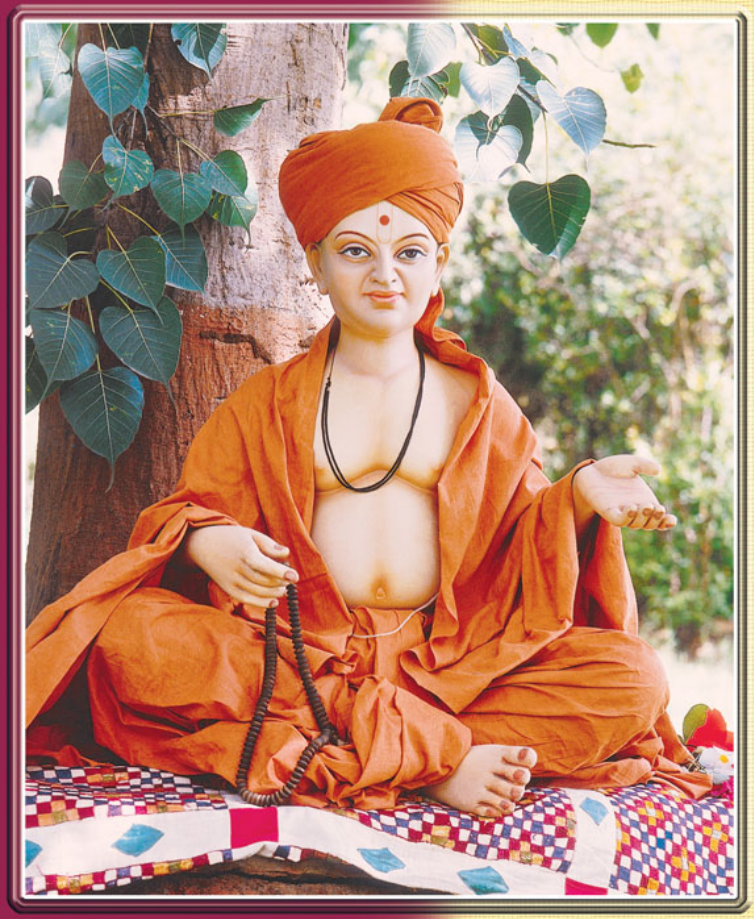
SATSANG PRAVIN



Gunatitanand Swami

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 14

Gunatitanand Swami

Translation by: BAPS Sadhus
Gujarati Text: Sadhu Bhagwatpriyadas

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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Glossary

Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organization, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, presents a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and extend their fullest co-operation.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum as worked out in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in the preparation of these books.

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

Vasant Panchmi
V.S. 2028 (1972 CE)
Atladra

Publisher's Note

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed in the Vachanamrut, "When God incarnates for the purpose of granting liberation to the *jivas,* he is always accompanied by his Akshardham, His attendants… and all of his divine powers… Therefore, a devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardham is present on this earth, and he should also explain this fact to others" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71).

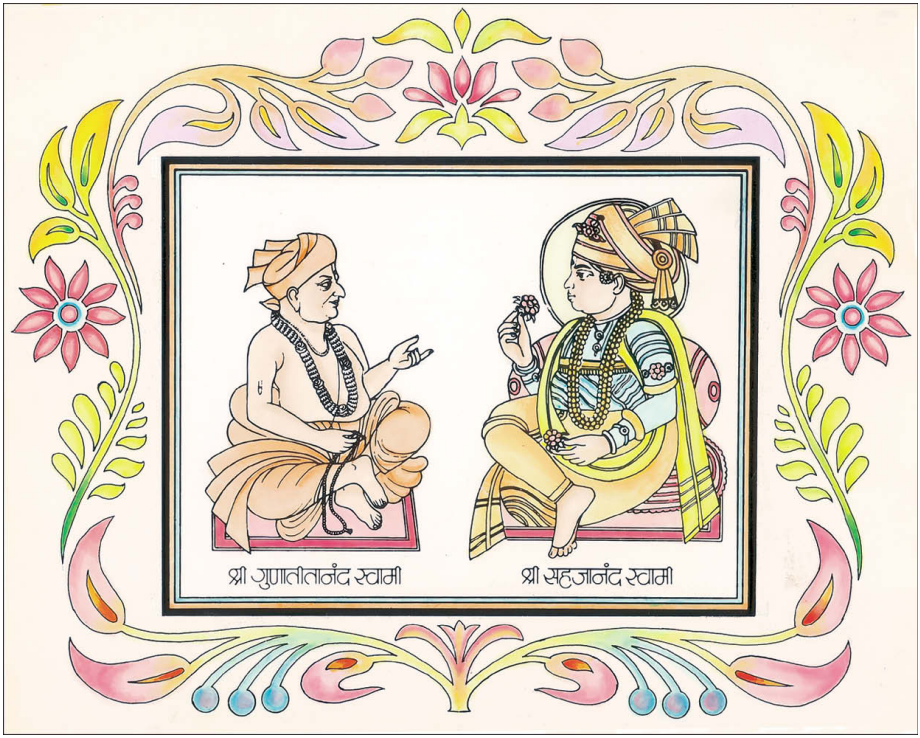
According to these words, Bhagwan Swaminarayan incarnated on earth, bringing with him his divine abode, Akshardham, in human form as Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami. He revealed him as Aksharbrahman, and taught the principle of offering devotion to Bhagwan Purushottam by attaining the *brahmarup* state.

Gunatitanand Swami holds a unique place among the five hundred *paramhansas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The life of Gunatitanand Swami is the very embodiment of pure divinity, hence he is revered as an ideal sadhu and guru. Gunatitanand Swami was among the first to reveal and spread the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on this earth.

Gunatitanand Swami's life confirmed the fact that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is ever manifest on this earth through Aksharbrahman and has kept the door of liberation for *jivas* open through a God-realized Sadhu. This book is an overview of the divine life of Gunatitanand Swami highlighting his devotion, spirit of service, spiritual understanding and the impact he had in transforming and inspiring the lives of others. It is based on the comprehensive biography *Anadi Mul Aksharmurti Sadguru Shri Gunatitanand Swami* by Shri Harshadbhai Dave.

The present publication is a translation, with slight modifications to suit the medium, of the Gujarati book *Gunatitanand Swami.*

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānni parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar Purushottam, Gunātit jnānne gāishu...ame 2
Ame sau Shriji tanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...ame 3
Juo sau motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kai te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātit Swāmi...ame 4

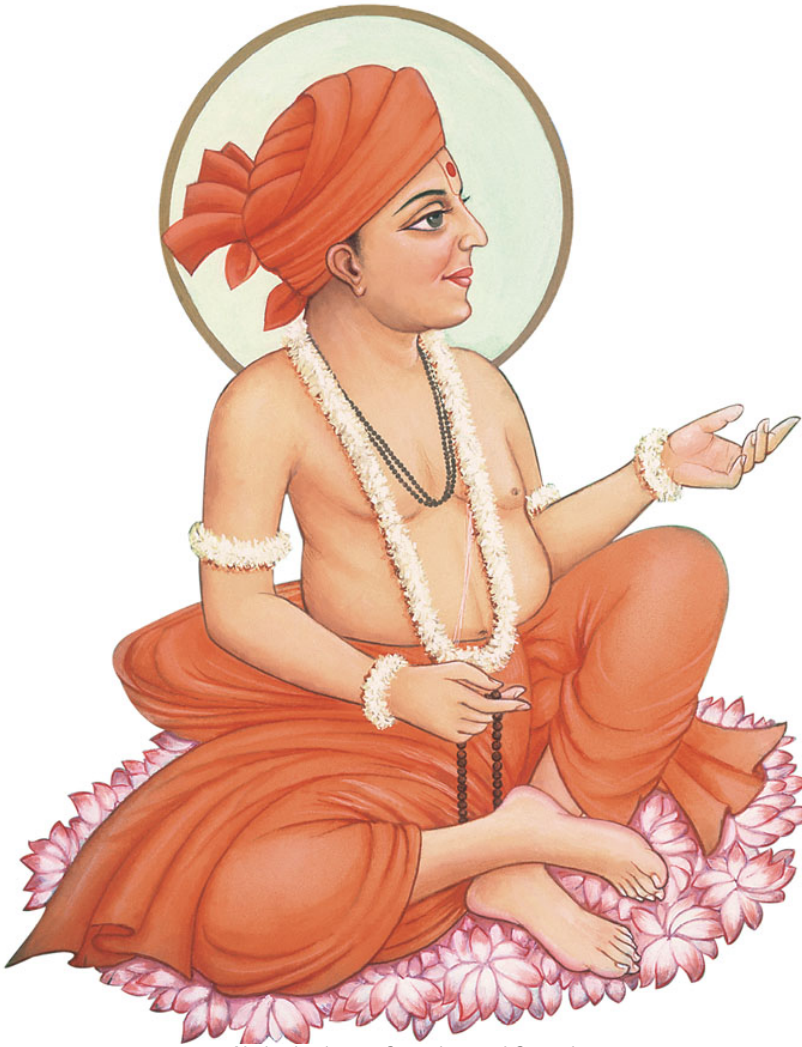
Translation

Pledge: Ame Sau Swamina Balak...

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this movement and will undergo any suffering. We will sing the praises of Akshar-Purushottam.

We are the sons of Shriji Maharaj; we have our abode in Akshar. Consecrated as we are to *swadharma* (religious faith), we have no apprehension whatsoever. Lord Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our

goal.



Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami

1. Birth

In the mid-18th century, Atmanand Swami travelled throughout the holy land of Saurashtra, in Gujarat, which is famous as the land of sadhus. Some of his devotees lived in the village of Latipur in Halar district (near Jamnagar). One of the devotees was Vallabhji Jani. A son, Bholanath, was born to him by the blessings of Swami. Similarly, a daughter, Sakarba, was born to Sukhdev Dave, who was also a devotee of Atmanand Swami. Both families were delighted with their newborn children. With the passage of time, and as instructed by Atmanand Swami, Bholanath and Sakarba joined

each other in wedlock. Atmanand Swami blessed Bholanath on his wedding ceremony.

Some time later Atmanand Swami appointed his chief disciple, Ramanand Swami, as his successor and ordered everybody to obey him. Having done this, he passed away.

After the death of their parents, Bholanath and Sakarba lived a happily married life in the beautiful village of Bhadra, situated on the banks of the river Und. Bholanath had deep faith in the deity Shiv. Sakarba, on the other hand, was a staunch devotee of Bhagwan Krishna. Yet, both of them co-operated with each other and worshipped their own deities. The couple was happy in all respects, but there was one thing lacking in their life; they had no son. The couple decided to go to Prabhaskshetra, in order to please and pray to Bholanath – Shivaji – to fulfil their desire for a son.

Bholanath and Sakarba set out for Prabhas with a group of pilgrims from their own village. They made a night halt at a Patel's house in the village of Mekhatimbi. The date was 1 April 1781 (Chaitra *sud* 8, Samvat 1837).

Patel had a heart-to-heart talk with Bholanath, who was a simple man and was one of the pilgrims who had put up at his place. In the course of their conversation Patel came to know that both Bholanath and his wife had set out on a pilgrimage with a desire to get a son. Patel was a staunch follower of Atmanand Swami. So he told Bholanath, "Remember Atmanand Swami and your desire will certainly be fulfilled."

On hearing this, there was a spark in Bholanath's heart. He remembered the blessings which Atmanand Swami had given him on the occasion of his sacred thread ceremony.

That same night Sakarba had a dream in which she had a vision of Atmanand Swami. Swami gave his blessings and said, "Tomorrow, Bhagwan Purushottam will take birth at Dharmadev's house in the Sarvar region; and four years from now, Akshar, the abode of God, will take birth as your child. So there is no need for you to go to Prabhas."

Sakarba woke up with a start. Akshar, the abode of God, would be born as her son! The joy of this couple knew no bounds after receiving the blessings. They left the group of pilgrims and returned home. They had faith in Atmanand Swami's words and passed their days happily. And then that auspicious day arrived!

At Bholanath's home on 17 October 1785 (Aso *sud* Punam, Samvat 1841), Sakarba gave birth to a son who was the incarnation of Akshar, the abode of Purushottam. The people of Bhadra rejoiced when they heard this good news in the delightful atmosphere of the Sharad season. After his early morning ablutions Bholanath gave alms to the people. Women of the village came to Sakarba's house with various gifts and presents. They congratulated her when they had the darshan of the child. Bholanath's house became a place of pilgrimage!

Bholanath called an astrologer and had the horoscope of his son prepared. Seeing that the child was born in the best possible positions of the planets the astrologer said, "Bholanath! This son of yours is a great form of Narayan. He will become very great and will liberate countless people. He will be an eloquent speaker like Brihaspati and will spread the *bhagvat* dharma."

After some time Ramanand Swami arrived at Bhadra. Bholanath showed him the

horoscope of his son and requested him to give him a name. Swami named him 'Mulji', gave his blessings and said, "According to the blessings of Atmanand Swami, this child is Akshar, the incarnation of the abode of the supreme Purushottam Bhagwan who has taken birth in the Sarvar region. And that Purushottam Bhagwan will visit your home."

Sakarba experienced great joy in having such a gem-like son born to her. Her motherly affection was overflowing. At the same time a unique sense of devotion also flowed from her heart when she thought about the divine personality of her son. Her heart danced when she saw or embraced Mulji. Anyone who saw the serene and moonlike lustre on Mulji's face felt a divine peace.

2. Childhood Years

When Mulji was four years old, he once asked for milk from his mother. Sakarba replied, "Dear son, I'll give it to you after offering it to Thakorji." On hearing this, Mulji smiled and said, "Mother! Thakorji is always present in my heart. When I eat, Thakorji eats with me. When I sleep, Thakorji sleeps with me. Therefore, when I drink milk, he too drinks with me."

Sakarba was taken by surprise when she heard her son's childlike words which were profound and spiritual. Sakarba offered a glass of milk to Mulji in order to fulfil his desire. Looking at his mother, Mulji smiled and drank the milk. Suddenly, at that time, Sakarba looked at Thakorji. She saw a thin white line on the lips of the *murti,* and she realized the truth behind Mulji's utterance.

It was 7 March 1789 (Fagan *sud* 10, Samvat 1845), when suddenly Mulji addressed his mother with zest, "Mother! Mother! The sacred thread ceremony of my Bhagwan Purushottam Narayan is being celebrated in Ayodhya today. So please sing songs of the sacred thread ceremony." Sakarba was delighted to hear these surprising words from her child.

Very often she used to tell the village women who met her on the riverbank or came to her home, "My Mulji talks as if he is a great scholar! Sometimes I do not even understand what he talks about. Still, I like to listen to his sweet words." As such, the innocent and pious people of the village always took the opportunity to have the darshan and company of Mulji.

* * *

Soon, Bholanath and Sakarba were blessed with another son. He was named Sundarji. Very often, while playing with Sundarji, Mulji would convey special spiritual talks to him. Once, Mulji was rocking the cradle of Sundarji. Mulji stopped the cradle every now and then and talked with Sundarji. "What are you talking about?" his mother asked. Mulji replied, "Mother! Mother! I am going to become a sadhu and will also make Sundarji a sadhu."

Sakarba was speechless. She lifted Sundarji from the cradle, embraced him and then said, "No dear! You are not to become a sadhu. Don't speak such inauspicious words."

On such occasions Sakarba's affectionate nature surfaced, and she looked upon Mulji from the worldly viewpoint.

* * *

Although he was very young, Mulji was very mature. He had a natural disinclination for worldly pleasures. Thus, he was never attracted towards eating, drinking and other such material enjoyments. He was always engrossed in the devotion and meditation of God. On many occasions he talked about Shriji Maharaj and made forecasts about his arrival. He was always absorbed in divine bliss as a result of his constant union with his Lord, Parabrahman Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Shri Sahajanand Swami. Sometimes people had the darshan of God himself manifest in the form of this child devotee.

Once, Mulji was engrossed in devotion to God. His father saw him and said, "Mulji! such devotion should be practised only when you are old. This is the time for you to eat, play and have fun."

Mulji did not utter a word when he heard his father say this. Instead, he simply went out of the house. Bholanath was pleased with his obedience. After some time Mulji returned and told his father, "You asked me to worship God in old age, but I just went around the village and found that many old people are sitting in the square busy gossiping. None of them remember God. So if we wait till old age we lose the opportunity of our precious youth. How can we rely on this body?"

Bholanath's eyes opened when he heard these words from Mulji which were full of deep understanding. He rejoiced in his heart and stopped putting obstacles in the worship of Mulji Bhakta.

Mulji had a liking for *kotha,* large berries and tamarind fruits. So whenever he ate these fruits Bholanath used to reprimand him. "Mulji! Do we not have wheat, ghee and jaggery in the house that you eat such things." Mulji never replied to this but through such actions everyone could see his natural inclination for austerity.

* * *

The sacred thread ceremony of Mulji Bhakta was celebrated on the auspicious day of 13 June 1793 (Jeth *sud* 5, Samvat 1849). The guru advised him to study well. On hearing this, Mulji replied, "I have studied *brahmavidya* in the form of the divine *lila* of the supreme God. So where is the need to study other things?"

The guru performed the ceremony of leaving for Kashi for pursuing further studies. In the village square, seven lines – symbolic of the seven seas – were drawn and Mulji was made to cross them. On the other side, his maternal uncle, Vashrambhai, was standing. He lifted Mulji on his shoulders and brought him home. The guru then asked him, "Why have you not gone to Kashi for studies." Mulji replied, "Purushottam Narayan, at whose lotus feet there are innumerable Kashis, will come here; so where is the need to go to Kashi?" Mulji Bhakta's statement put everyone into deep thought.

* * *

When Mulji Bhakta entered adolescence his curiosity about other *sampradayas* increased. Although he was himself omniscient he behaved like a layman. He was always very eager to go to preceptors of different religious orders to learn their beliefs.

In this way he learnt the principle of Shuddhadvait from Acharya Gosai Narsinhlalji of the Vaishnav Sampradaya. But on seeing some malpractices he did not take any further interest. The Pranami sect was also very popular in those days. So he studied that also. Finally, he was convinced by the pure *bhagvat* dharma taught by his father's guru, Ramanand Swami, whom he accepted as his own guru.

After a while Bholanath passed away. At that time the supreme God, in the form of Nilkanth Varni, was travelling on his pilgrimage of India. Mulji Bhakta would have his darshan everyday. Once, while engrossed in darshan he began to sing:

Vanmā vhālo vichare te āvshe āpne gām,
Mātā mujne jānjo te ja Prabhunu Dhām.

"My Lord is travelling in the forests and will come to our village; Mother, know me as the abode of that Lord."

In this way he explained to his mother, "Mother, God will come to our house and have food made by you. Tell me, how fortunate you are!" Sakarba simply listened to all this with awe and wonder. But after some time, Mulji would talk in the normal worldly manner and would make his mother forget her awe and respect for him, and then he would leave for the farm.

Once, Mulji was on his way to the farm with his friends. Many times he used to combine knowledge with fun when he was with his friends. On their way to the farm they came across a well. Everyone peeped into the well. Then Mulji threw a stone in it. As a result the moss which covered the water dispersed and everyone could see the clear water. Mulji showed this to all the children and said, "See how clear the water has become. Due to the moss, we could not see the water as it is. Similarly, *maya* covers the *jiva* and does not allow the *jiva* to worship God." It was then that the children asked Mulji out of curiosity, "Have you seen God?" Mulji replied, "I see God constantly and he will certainly come here."

Once, Ramanand Swami arrived in Shekhpat. Mulji Bhakta went to Shekhpat to have his darshan. Lalji Suthar, a staunch devotee of Swami, lived here. Subsequently, a strong friendship developed between these two devotees. After some time Swami left, but Lalji Bhakta and Mulji Bhakta continued to meet for satsang. The distance between Bhadra and Shekhpat was about 17 km. Every night both these devotees met half way in a mandir of Lord Shiv. Both of them covered a distance of about 8.5 km. For the whole night they would engage in satsang and talk about the divine incidents of Ramanand Swami. In the morning, they would again walk the same distance back home. In this way they enjoyed each other's company for a number of years. They never cared for sleep, fatigue or rest. Such was their enthusiasm!

3. First Encounter with Shriji Maharaj

Mulji was now 15-years-old. At that time the supreme God, who was born in the Sarvar region, had completed his pilgrimage of India, and known as Nilkanth Varni,

had arrived at the village of Loj. He met Muktanand Swami there. After some time he met Ramanand Swami at Piplana. Ramanand Swami decided to give *bhagvati diksha* to Nilkanth Varni on 28 October 1800 (Kartik *sud* 11, Samvat 1857). He invited all his devotees on the occasion of this *diksha* ceremony. Along with other devotees Lalji Bhakta from Shekhpat and Mulji Bhakta from Bhadra also arrived in Piplana. It was here that Bhakta and Bhagwan – the two eternal divine forms of Brahman and Parabrahman – met for the first time in this world.

Mulji Bhakta was overwhelmed with emotion when he saw Nilkanth Varni face-to-face for the first time! Varni also showed his affection and embraced his dear devotee. Thereafter, he addressed all the devotees and said. "This Mulji Bhakta is in constant union with me and, in future, he will spread my glory."

On hearing this, Ramanand Swami said with delight, "Varni! You are right. Mulji is very great!"

Nilkanth Varni then said, "He is my abode – the manifest form of Aksharbrahman."

In this way God himself, in the form of Varni, described in public, for the first time, the glory of Mulji Bhakta as the incarnation of Aksharbrahman.

* * *

Everyone in the village had begun to realize the greatness of Mulji Bhakta. Once, when Mulji was sitting at the shop of Vashram Suthar in the village square, a sannyasi came and demanded alms, "I am hungry, so please give me something to eat, otherwise I'll die and go to the abode of Vaikunth."

On hearing this Mulji said, "Sannyasiji, if you wish to go to Vaikunth, just stretch your leg and I'll throw you and send you there."

"O Brother, is the divine abode so near?" the sannyasi asked.

Mulji replied, "Sannyasiji, the abode is standing before you in a human form, and the Lord of the abode is travelling to bless all at present, but how can people like you recognize him?"

Vashram Suthar then intervened and said, "Sannyasiji, what Mulji says is true. So don't stretch your leg, otherwise, if he throws you from here, he will send you straight to the abode of Vaikunth."

Indeed! How can an insignificant soul go to Akshardham, which is beyond the eight barriers? But Mulji was the incarnation of Brahman and therefore he could say so. When the sannyasi realized the power and glory of Mulji he was frightened and promptly departed.

* * *

Similarly, once in Bhadra, Nathu, the barber, was busy shaving Mulji Bhakta. Nathu was a devotee of Shri Ram, and he commented, "How great was Shri Ramachandra! He carried the entire town of Ayodhya to Vaikunth." On hearing this Mulji Bhakta said, "Nathu, if you wish, I'll take the entire village of Bhadra to Akshardham!"

On hearing this Nathu the barber laughed. Then a cool and serene light emanated from Mulji's body and spread everywhere. Everyone present was dazzled. Nathu stood up. He saw that Mulji Bhakta was smiling in the midst of the light. Soon the light was absorbed in Mulji's body. Nathu was astonished and stared at Mulji Bhakta. Then,

Kanji, who was present there, stated, “Nathu, everyone says that Mulji is the incarnation of Akshar.” But poor Nathu, what would he understand about Akshar! However he could see that Mulji was a great devotee.

4. Glory of Mulji Bhakta As Described by Maharaj in Bhadra

During his *vicharan,* Shriji Maharaj (Shri Hari) arrived at Alaiya in 1804 CE (Samvat 1860). At that time devotees from Bhadra were present there. They all requested Shriji Maharaj to visit Bhadra. So, Maharaj came to Bhadra for the first time.

Shri Hari would daily go to the river Und for a bath in the company of Vashrambhai, Dosabhai, Rajobhai, Ramobhai, Ratnabhai, Muljibhai, Sundarji and others. On the bank of the river there is a giant banyan tree. Shri Hari used to dive from the tree into the river. He played water sports with the devotees and then made them sit on the riverbank to meditate.

Once, Shriji Maharaj spread a thick square piece of cotton cloth on the water surface and sat on it together with Mulji Bhakta, Lalji Suthar and other devotees. Maharaj steered the cloth like a boat with his yogic power. Such were his divine *lila* before the devotees of Bhadra!

* * *

Once, in the evening, Vashram Suthar reached his fields earlier than usual. He saw hundreds of thousands of ants coming out from a big ant-hill and thought, “How can these *jivas* associate with the supreme God and his divine abode who are present here in person at this moment?” With this thought he looked up at the sky. And he saw hundreds of thousands of *vimans* coming from Vaikunth. The ants assumed *chaturbhuj* forms and transcended to the divine abode.

Vashrambhai was amazed. On reaching home he described to Shriji Maharaj as to what had happened. Shri Hari told him, “We want to liberate tens of millions of *jivas.* My divine abode, Akshardham, has incarnated in your village as Mulji Bhakta. So I will fulfil all your wishes. Today, you resolved like this for the ants, but had you done so for the whole universe, the whole universe would have attained liberation.”

Everyone was amazed at Maharaj’s words. Shriji Maharaj stayed for six days here and then departed.

* * *

Shriji Maharaj came again to Bhadra in 1808 CE (Samvat 1864).

This time each and every devotee of Bhadra insisted that Maharaj should dine at his place. So Maharaj dined at the house of a different devotee everyday. Maharaj always kept Mulji Bhakta with him and granted him divine bliss.

Once, Maharaj was on his way to the home of Deva Kanbi for dinner. Mulji’s house was on the way. Maharaj arrived there with a group of devotees. At that time Mulji was eating cooked *juvar* and yoghurt. Maharaj enquired about his well-being and

proceeded further. On the way, Maharaj described the glory of Mulji Bhakta and said, "This Mulji, who lives in a small hut at present and eats *juvar,* will one day live in big havelis and become the governor of thousands of devotees. He will become a great renunciant. His glory will spread overseas. His *murti* will be installed in mandirs along with mine and millions of devotees will worship him."

In this way, with Maharaj describing the glory of Mulji Bhakta, all of them arrived at Deva Kanbi's house. The thoughts of Maharaj were preoccupied with Mulji and so he asked, "Have we arrived at Mulji's place?"

Everybody then replied, "No Maharaj, this is the house of Deva Kanbi and we are to dine here today." Hearing these words, Maharaj smiled.

* * *

After some time the day of Sharad Punam (Aso *sud* 15) arrived. It was the birthday of Mulji Bhakta or Akshar – the abode of Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj announced it, and for the first time celebrated the birthday of Akshar at Bhadra in his own presence by distributing the *mahaprasad* of *dudh-pauva*. In this way, Maharaj explained the glory of Mulji Bhakta to all on many occasions.

* * *

One day Maharaj was to dine at Mulji Bhakta's house. Along with Vashrambhai, Dosabhai, Ratnabhai and other devotees Shriji Maharaj arrived very early at Mulji Bhakta's place. Mulji had gone to the farm for some work and Sakarba was busy cooking. Sakarba prepared a seat for Maharaj. Maharaj sat on it and asked Sakarba, "Mother, does your Mulji ever remember me?"

"Maharaj! He remembers you all day. He does not forget you for a moment, even when he is busy working or moving around. I feel that Mulji does not love anybody more than you in this world."

"I also constantly remember Mulji," said Maharaj with a smile, while looking at Sakarba.

Then Sakarba began talking about Mulji, "During his childhood he used to tell us about your divine incidents, such as, your sacred thread ceremony, your travels in the forests, your arrival in Loj, etc. And he told me, 'Maharaj will certainly come here one day and eat food prepared by you.' "

On hearing this Maharaj smiled and said, "Mother! you will not be able to understand, but your son Mulji is my divine abode, Akshardham. Even while he was in your womb, and before that also, he used to see me constantly. He is bound to me and I am bound to him. Mulji is so great that he upholds the infinite universes within each of which are Brahman, Vishnu, Mahesh and the ten incarnations. He is above Prakruti-Purush, is the form of *sachchidanand*, is omnipresent and is the cause and support of everything. I perform everything through him. He is such a dedicated devotee that I cannot live without him even for a moment. It is through his spiritual association that all the *jivas*, *ishwars* and avatars obtain final *moksha* by becoming pure *chaitanya brahman*. This Mulji is the cause of all, and is pure *chaitanya* Brahman."

Sakarba felt Maharaj's words to be like a rain of *amrut*! Tears ran down her cheeks. She told Maharaj, "O Maharaj, how can I, an ignorant *jiva,* come to know that my Mulji

is so great! Out of attachment, I consider Mulji to be my son and have scolded him and made him work. Now when will I be relieved of all these sins?"

Shriji Maharaj told her, "Mother, you have already achieved *moksha* due to your association with your great son, then where is the question of sin? Your Mulji has countless redemptive virtues and is Gunatit – above all *gunas.*"

On hearing the divine words of Maharaj, Sakarba was extremely delighted. She had not realized the greatness of her son. She had not even understood much of what Maharaj had said to her. But she now firmly understood that Mulji is great and divine. Engrossed in the delight of her extremely great attainment, Sakarba sat listening intently to the talks of Shriji Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj did not tire in explaining to the devotees the glory of Mulji Bhakta.

Then Maharaj told the devotees, "O devotees! You will realize my true glory only when you've realized the glory of Mulji Bhakta."

Vashram Bhatt enquired, "O Maharaj, will your glory be understood only if the glory of Akshar is understood?"

Shriji Maharaj smiled and said, "Yes, when you understand the true glory of Akshar, and become *aksharrup* only then will you be able to understand my glory. This Mulji is Aksharbrahman incarnate. The Upanishads and other scriptures describe him as my abode and form. That Aksharbrahman is beyond everything and I am beyond Akshar. Aksharbrahman liberates one from the ocean of life."

Like the river Ganga flowing continuously, words continued to flow from Shriji Maharaj's mouth. Dosabhai, Ratnabhai, Vashrambhai and other devotees were spellbound listening to the glory of Mulji Bhakta from Shriji Maharaj himself.

Maharaj continued, "The glory of Aksharbrahman is so great, yet if someone denies the existence of Aksharbrahman or does not know his glory then he will become non-existent, that is his soul will become like an inanimate object. Therefore, all aspirants must understand the glory of Akshar. Mulji Bhakta is the incarnation of that Aksharbrahman. I am Purushottam Narayan residing within that Aksharbrahman. If you all understand at least this much then you will all attain *ekantik* dharma, for the establishment of which I have incarnated."

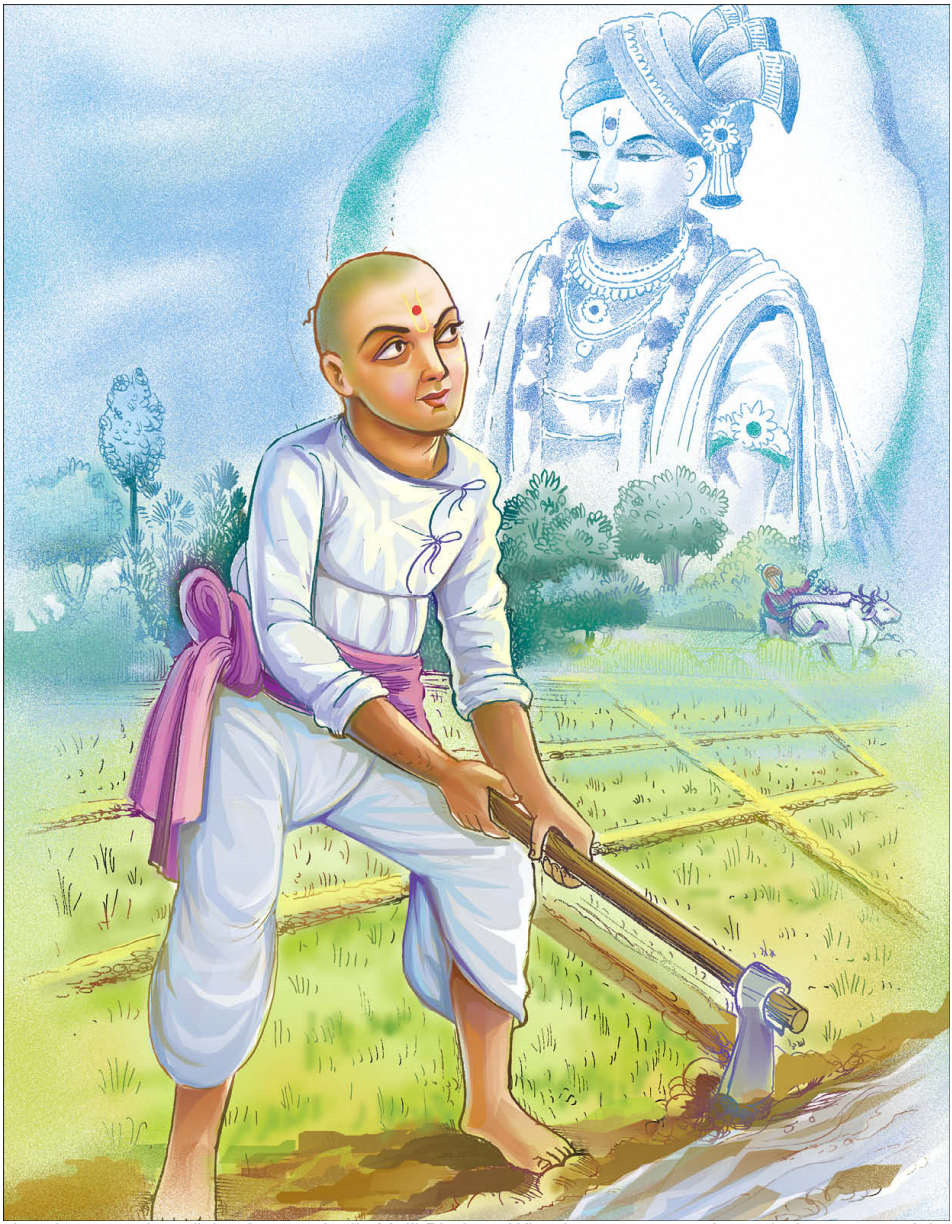
Shriji Maharaj's divine words penetrated deep into the hearts of the devotees. Everyone was delighted. A divine serenity pervaded everywhere. All were gratified to learn the real identity of Mulji Bhakta as the gateway to *moksha*.

Meanwhile, Mulji Bhakta arrived there. Till now everyone had only witnessed his divine incidents; today they had an opportunity to know his real identity from Shriji Maharaj himself.

Maharaj then proceeded for dinner. Maharaj insisted that Mulji Bhakta should also dine with him. Thereafter, Maharaj left and went to his lodgings.

In this way, during his stay at Bhadra, Maharaj granted divine happiness to everyone and explained the true glory of Mulji Bhakta. After some time, Sakarba passed away to Akshardham.

5. Renunciation and Initiation



Maharaj appears in a divine form and tells Mulji Bhakta, "What have you come for and what are you doing?"

Mulji always remained aloof from family ties, and was disinterested in worldly affairs. The day was 21 November 1809 (Kartik *sud* Punam in Samvat 1866). Mulji Bhakta was busy diverting water to his sugarcane field situated by the riverbank. He was thinking about when Maharaj would instruct him to renounce this world. Then suddenly, he had a vision of Shriji Maharaj in the sky. Maharaj was wearing a yellow pitambar and a southern-style pagh.

Maharaj said to Mulji Bhakta, “What have you come for and what are you doing? The divine light of Brahman has faded away from the world, so leave now.”

Without a moment’s delay Mulji left his work. He did not even go home, but headed for Gadhada to meet Maharaj. After that Mulji requested Shri Hari to allow him to remain in his service.

Mulji had detached himself completely from the world and had no interest whatsoever in material objects. In order that others may realize the spiritual state of Mulji, Shriji Maharaj tested him and said, “I will make you a sadhu, but have you burnt your house or have you kept it intact?”

The simple-natured Mulji replied, “Maharaj, the house is as it is.”

“Then go and burn it, and come back. I’ll make you a sadhu after that,” instructed Maharaj.

To fulfil Maharaj’s order Mulji left immediately for Bhadra. Maharaj knew that Mulji would come back only after burning his house. So he immediately sent Bhaguji and called him back. From the spiritual viewpoint, Mulji had already burnt all ties of affection with his family, estate and relatives from his heart. But he was also prepared to destroy all the physical ties. Seeing his profound detachment Maharaj showered praise on him.

After some time his younger brother, Sundarji, arrived with a Brahmin to take Mulji back. The Brahmin addressed Mulji:

Sansārmā sarso rahe ne man māri pās jo,
Sansārmā lopāy nahi te jan māro dās jo.

“He who engages in worldly activities, but has his mind on me; He who is not attached to worldly activities, know him to be my devotee.”

Mulji Bhakta replied:

“Chittki vrutti ek hai, bhāve tahi lagāo;
Chāhe to Hari ki bhakti karo, chāhe to vishay kamāo.”

“The mind can focus only on one thing, so attach it where you like; If you wish, offer devotion to God or indulge in material pleasures.”

With these words Mulji refused to return home.

Maharaj told Mulji Bhakta, “Go home for now.”

But Mulji replied, “I don’t want to go back home. I want to remain constantly in your service.”

So Maharaj explained to him to go back and said, “If your hand is trapped under a heavy stone, it should be removed tactfully and not by force. So go back home for the present, and come back here after convincing everybody.”

Mulji obeyed Maharaj’s order and went home. After some time he returned with his younger brother, Sundarji, whom he had also persuaded to become a sadhu.

Shriji Maharaj initiates Mulji Bhakta into the sadhu-fold during a grand yagna in Dabhan

Darkness can never exist in the presence of the sun. Who can possibly bind one who is detached and unchanging? To spread *brahmavidya* Mulji Bhakta became active in the service of Shriji Maharaj and withdrew from all his worldly ties, like a tortoise who withdraws its limbs.

* * *

In January 1810 CE (Posh, Samvat 1866) Shriji Maharaj began a great *yagna* in Dabhan to initiate his eternal devotee Aksharbrahman Mulji Bhakta into the sadhu-fold. In this *yagna* (in which no animals were sacrificed), Maharaj fed and gave donations to thousands of Brahmins, who were thus highly satisfied. On the day of Punam, 20 January 1810 CE, before the *yagna* was concluded Maharaj ceremoniously gave Mulji Bhakta the *bhagvati diksha* and named him Gunatitanand Swami.

6. Who Is That Sadguru?

Shriji Maharaj reveals the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as the Sadguru

In the beginning, under orders from Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami travelled with Muktanand Swami's group. One day they arrived in Jetalpur. At night, Muktanand Swami made preparations to sleep. Swami also decided to retire for the night. Muktanand Swami lay down on the stony ground without any bedding. So, Gunatitanand Swami was also about to lie down to sleep in the same manner. Muktanand Swami saw this and told him to make a bed for himself so that the stones would not hurt him.

"But you are sleeping on the bare ground without any bedding," Swami said.

Muktanand Swami replied, “I have been instructed by Maharaj to do so.”

On hearing this, Swami humbly replied, “The orders of Maharaj are meant for all. I, too, care for *moksha*.”

Muktanand Swami was very happy to see the attitude of this young sadhu and said, “You’ll progress far.”

* * *

In March 1811 CE (Fagan, Samvat 1867) Maharaj decided to celebrate the festival of Fuldol at Rathod Dhadhal’s place in Sarangpur. Sadhus and devotees from near and far arrived in large numbers. Preparations were made for the celebration of Fuldol – the festival of spraying holy coloured water. But before that, with a specific spiritual purpose in mind, Maharaj began to sing the Holi verses of Kabir:

Jogiyā tālat janam kerā fāslā re,
Premnā pyālā Jogiyā, jug jug jiva so Jogiyā.

“The noose of the cycle of births is removed by the *brahmanized* Sadhus. They are the cup of love. May they live for all time.”

Maharaj would sing and the sadhus would repeat. And then Maharaj would sing further:

Koti Krishna jode hāth, koti Vishnu name māth,
Koti Shankar dhare dhyān, koti Brahmā kathe gnān,
Sadguru khele vasant.

“Millions of Krishnas join their hands, millions of Vishnus bow their heads, millions of Shivs meditate, millions of Brahmas impart knowledge, as the Sadguru celebrates the festival of Spring.”

Maharaj stopped playing *ras* when he sang this stanza. He touched the stick that he was holding to Gunatitanand Swami’s chest, drew the attention of Anand Swami and Muktanand Swami and asked them, “Swami, who is that Sadguru*?”*

All the sadhus replied with one voice, “Maharaj, you are that Sadguru. Who else could it be?”

Maharaj, out of his infinite grace, explained, “These words describe the glory of a Sadguru. I am the supreme Purushottam Narayan. And that Sadguru is this Gunatitanand Swami. The composer of this Holi verse, Kabir, addressed and worshipped Aksharbrahman as ‘Sadguru Saheb’. That Akshar supports innumerable *muktas* and Purushottam in the form of an abode, and he is in my service in the manifest form of Gunatitanand Swami. He has manifested today with me in the form of this Sadguru in order to spread my supreme *upasana.* The glory described in the Holi verses is his glory, and I am above him, his master; I am Purushottam Narayan, worthy of worship even by him.”

All the sadhus were astonished when they heard the infinite glory of Swami from Maharaj himself. How could anybody realize the glory of this young Swami when he himself always behaved in the most humble manner?

7. Craving for Darshan

Gunatitanand Swami stands in the rain at night to have Maharaj's darshan

The glory of great people lies in their way of life. The divine virtues of Swami, described by Shriji Maharaj, were observed in his life on many occasions.

It was 1812 CE (Samvat 1868). There was a light shower of rain on that dark night in Gadhada. The sky was covered with clouds and was illuminated with intermittent thunderbolts. All the sadhus had retired to sleep after enjoying the spiritual discourses and darshan of Maharaj.

At that time Gunatitanand Swami was standing half-drenched under the eaves of a room, trying to save himself from the rain, while waiting to have a glimpse of Maharaj. Meanwhile, Muktanand Swami came out of his room for some reason and saw somebody standing there. So he enquired, "Who's there?"

Swami humbly replied, "It is I, Nirgunanand. I am waiting for a glimpse of Maharaj when he returns after his discourse at the *darbar.*"

Muktanand Swami was surprised when he saw Swami's desire for Maharaj's darshan. He thought to himself, "Oh! Look at his deep faith. He cares neither for his body nor for sleep. Although he sees Maharaj's *murti* constantly in his heart, he craves so much for Maharaj's personal darshan." With this thought Muktanand Swami returned to his room.

But Swami stood there till late in the night, half-drenched and shivering. When Maharaj returned after delivering discourses, Swami had a glimpse of him in the light of a thunderbolt. Thereafter, he went to the outskirts of Gadhada and slept under the

shade of a tree by the banks of the river Ghela, since at that time there was no mandir in Gadhada. So, Maharaj and the senior sadhus slept in the *darbar* and the other sadhus slept either on the riverbank or on the wooden platforms of shops in the village.

8. Control of Senses

Maharaj says, "How can I show my back to a sadhu like you?"

In 1813 CE (Samvat 1869), there was a severe drought in Kathiawad. In order to

lighten the consequent burden, Maharaj sent Muktanand Swami to Surat with a group of two hundred sadhus. Gunatitanand Swami was also included in this group. There, just opposite the lodgings of the sadhus, somebody had tied a mischievous monkey in an empty house. Everybody's attention was naturally drawn towards the monkey due to its restive movements.

One night, whilst giving a discourse, Muktanand Swami addressed all the sadhus, "See, how restless are our senses! They always deceive us. In the opposite building there is a monkey. There is no need for us to look there, but there is hardly anyone among us who has not seen that monkey. If there is anybody who has not seen it, please stand up."

Everyone was speechless as they listened to Muktanand Swami. Only Gunatitanand Swami stood up with folded hands from among the two hundred sadhus. Seeing this, Muktanand Swami was also surprised and he said, "Oh! You are the only one among the two hundred sadhus who has controlled his senses. Even I have looked at that monkey."

Gunatitanand Swami constantly looked inward and there was nothing in his heart, except the *murti* of Maharaj. Muktanand Swami was all praise for Swami's *brahmic* state.

During those days in Surat, all the sadhus took turns in going to the city for collecting alms. But Swami went everyday, as instructed by Muktanand Swami. The reason was that other sadhus had to fast invariably because they mistakenly glanced at women; but Swami had no difficulty in observing this strict rule because he was totally absorbed in the *murti* of Maharaj. His companion sadhus changed everyday, but he went out unperturbed for this service daily.

Once, while they were collecting alms, Anand Swami also witnessed Swami's constant focus on the divine form of Shriji Maharaj. Swami was holding the front two ends of the *joli* containing alms. He was walking with his eyes looking towards the ground, calling out, *"Narayan hare, Sachchidanand prabho*." At that time, Maharaj appeared in front of Swami in a divine form, walking backwards to give his darshan. Swami bowed to Maharaj and prayed, "O Maharaj! Please walk in a normal manner because the ground is uneven and you might fall over."

Maharaj replied, "How can I show my back to a sadhu like you?"

By the grace of Maharaj, Anand Swami saw and heard all this. He realized the tremendous glory of Swami. In this way Swami collected alms for six months in Surat.

Swami had no interest in anything except the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. *"Yogashchitta vrutti nirodhah."* "Yoga is the control of the natural tendencies of the mind." This ultimate goal of Yoga was achieved by Swami through his constant focus on the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. And yet he constantly craved for the face-to-face darshan of Maharaj.

9. Obedience

Once, Muktanand Swami was addressing an assembly of devotees and sadhus in Surat. One devotee enquired regarding the whereabouts of Maharaj because he wanted to send pickles made from fresh, soft bamboo, ginger and pepper to Maharaj.

Muktanand Swami replied, "Of late, I have no news from Maharaj, but he is likely to be at Gadhada. I, too, want to send my book, *Sati Gita,* which I have recently finished writing, to be sanctified. Let us send some willing sadhu."

Honouring the wish of Muktanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami immediately showed his willingness to go. Another sadhu, named Shantanand, insisted on going and said, "Whether you tell me or not, I'll also go."

Swami was ready with three jars of pickles, the *Sati Gita* scripture, a very fine mat, a pot of *barfi*, and other things. The affectionate devotees of Surat requested Swami to embrace Maharaj on their behalf. Thereafter, walking day and night, and remembering Maharaj, Swami reached Gadhada on the fourth day. Here, because of the famine Maharaj was living undercover and did not meet anyone. Swami stayed by the banks of the river Ghela. He enquired regarding the whereabouts of Maharaj from whoever came from the *darbar,* but could not get reliable information. At last, Naja Jogia brought the news, "Maharaj is going to Kariyani. So you reach there."

Swami reached Kariyani with great enthusiasm and sent a message to Maharaj. On hearing the name of Gunatitanand Swami, Maharaj affectionately called him. Swami met Maharaj in the darbar of Vasta Khachar. Shriji Maharaj was about to begin his dinner. Swami offered the pickles and sweets. Maharaj took them with great affection and gave prasad to Swami. Swami was engrossed in the divine pleasure of Maharaj's murti, without blinking. The fatigue due to the journey was soon forgotten. As soon as Swami conveyed the message of the devotees of Surat, Maharaj stood up from his seat and embraced Gunatitanand Swami. As Swami recalled the name of each devotee one by one, Maharaj embraced Swami each time. Thus, Maharaj embraced him twenty-two times. Thereafter, Swami stopped taking names of the devotees to avoid straining Maharaj. Then Shantanand Swami came forward to embrace Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj said, "You have come wilfully, so I'll not embrace you."

Swami intervened and requested, "Maharaj, he has carried the jars on the way and offered his services, so please embrace him."

So Maharaj honoured the wish of Swami, but said, "I did not find it hard to embrace Swami twenty-two times, but I found it hard to embrace you even once, because you have come without orders."

In this way he described the importance of obedience.

10. Indifference to Body

In 1814 CE (Samvat 1870) Dada Khachar's father, Abhel Khachar, passed away. So sweets, such as, *sata, jalebis,* were prepared in the *darbar* everyday as part of the post-funeral rites. Maharaj himself served all the sadhus. Swami also would sit in the line to

dine with the others. He would enjoy the bliss of Maharaj's *murti* and eat whatever was served in his bowl. Along with other sadhus, Maharaj fed Swami so much that Swami became ill after some time due to an excess intake of sugar. His digestive system became weak. He could digest only milk; so Maharaj instructed him to take milk only.

Thereafter, when Swami was travelling in the Nagher region (near Una) in Krupanand Swami's group, he used to consume coconut with milk. This made him all the more weak; but he never cared for his body. Once Maharaj gave him darshan in the form of a Jogi by a well on the outskirts of Kovaiya village and said, "Sadhuram! Why is your belly bloated? It seems you have drunk excess milk. I am concerned about your body…" And so saying he disappeared. Swami stopped taking milk, realizing the wish of Maharaj, and observed this rule for the rest of his life.

Thereafter, Krupanand Swami arrived at Gadhada. Swami was also with the group. Here, Maharaj gave *rotlo* and *adad dal* for Swami to eat. Then he added a lot of chilli powder to the *adad dal.* In addition, he gave chilli sauce. Swami was not used to such spicy, hot food. But he ate everything that was served, regarding it as *prasad* from Maharaj. As a result of this, he suffered a bout of diarrhoea. So he went to a place on the bank of river Ghela. He would sleep there, go to empty his bowels and take a bath. This continued for three days, after which he recovered from the ailment. Then Swami came for Maharaj's darshan. Maharaj was very happy to see him in good health.

11. Eloquent Speaker

Although Swami was of a saintly nature he was very adept in practical matters. As a preacher he was of the highest calibre. His speech was clear. His preaching described the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and nurtured virtues, like, supreme bhakti, dharma*, jnan, vairagya* and others. His nectarine speech flowed from his lips like the constant flow of the river Ganga.

Once, in Gadhada, Swami asked four questions to Maharaj, "Which out of the following four means is the best? To constantly meditate on God, to behave as *atma*, to serve the ill or to deliver spiritual discourses."

Maharaj asked these questions to the other sadhus. Everyone replied according to his own inclination. When Maharaj asked Muktanand Swami, he said that meditation was the best means. But Maharaj differed from his opinion, and said, "To deliver spiritual discourses is the best means. The first three endeavours are only for one's own *moksha*, while the last one gives *moksha* to both the speaker as well as the listener." After this incident Swami decided to talk continuously about the glory of Maharaj and never to allow any lull to creep in.

* * *

Whenever Maharaj was in Gadhada he would grant happiness to his devotees through his *lila*. Once, Gunatitanand Swami had also come there. Maharaj, on many occasions would declare the glory of Swami as his choicest devotee.

On one occasion Maharaj called the eighteen *sadgurus* – Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Anand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, and others – for lunch at Dada Khachar's *darbar*. Maharaj made them sit in a circle and began to serve them himself. Maharaj said to all the sadhus, "All of you should learn to dine in the manner in which Gunatitanand Swami dines."

So Brahmanand Swami said with tongue-in-cheek, "The sadhu eats very well."

Hearing this Maharaj said, "It is not as you understand it to be. This sadhu, in fact, relishes the taste of my *murti* and puts food in his stomach just as one puts grains into a jar. Moreover, he hides his powers and behaves in a humble manner, otherwise, the number of people which follow me would also follow him."

Learning this opinion of Maharaj, Brahmanand Swami acknowledged and said, "Yes Maharaj, he is a great sadhu."

Similarly, Maharaj was once serving food to the sadhus at Panchala. Gunatitanand Swami was taking his meals with Atmanand Swami seated on one side and Krupanand Swami on the other. Seeing this, Maharaj smiled and said, "Oh! A goat between two tigers." Thereafter, Maharaj took four *motaiya* ladoos in his hands and addressed Kalyanbhai of Vanthali, "Kalyanbhai, do you know this sadhu? He is my abode, Akshardham incarnate. Know him." And so saying, Maharaj served all the four *motaiya* ladoos to Swami. Thus, Kalyanbhai and others who were present realized the true glory of Gunatitanand Swami.

12. Inclination to Serve

Once, Maharaj arrived at Kariyani from Gadhada. From here Maharaj wanted to go to Vartal for the festival of Ram Navmi or Hari Jayanti. But suddenly nineteen sadhus fell ill. Maharaj said, "I'll give the fruits of one hundred festivals to whoever stays to serve these ailing sadhus." But nobody was prepared to leave Maharaj and stay behind to serve the ailing sadhus. Only Swami, who always knew Maharaj's inner wish, volunteered. Maharaj was very happy and said, "Kudos to this sadhu! He has not let me down."

Maharaj then left for Vartal. Swami served the ailing sadhus with enthusiasm. By the grace of Maharaj all the sadhus recovered fully. There were still a few days to go before the festival, so Swami expressed his desire to go. All the sadhus gave their consent willingly and requested Swami to embrace Maharaj on their behalf. Swami reached Vartal by constantly remembering Maharaj along the way. Maharaj was very happy to see Swami for having served the ailing sadhus, and embraced him nineteen times.

* * *

From the very beginning, Swami was in Muktanand Swami's group. But other *sadgurus*, like, Krupanand Swami, Bhai Atmanand Swami, Mota Ramdas Swami, Brahmanand Swami and others requested that he be placed in their group. So, Maharaj

used to post Swami to each group in turn. Everyone wanted him due to his modesty, service-mindedness, politeness and constant love for spiritual discourses. Each group treated him with love and respect. When Atmanand Swami was sick, Swami remained in his group to nurse him. After Atmanand Swami's recovery, and with his permission, Swami joined Krupanand Swami's group.

Krupanand Swami was extremely affectionate towards Maharaj. He disliked even the slightest disobedience in carrying out Maharaj's orders. He disapproved of any behaviour outside the rules of Satsang. Therefore, only those sadhus who were patient and who only saw the virtues in others continued with him. That's why Swami preferred to stay in his group. Once somebody asked him, "Why do you like to be with Krupanand Swami?"

Swami replied, "Unless a person is disciplined by elders he cannot imbibe the virtues of seniors. One cannot find out one's own merits and demerits without being told. Only those who obey the guru can cultivate the virtues of great people. Krupanand Swami is forthright, so I prefer to remain with him."

13. Prayer for the Persecutor

While accompanying Krupanand Swami, Gunatita-nand Swami and other sadhus arrived at the village of Juna Savar on the banks of the river Shetrunji. There were light showers of rain. The sadhus started begging for alms in the village. The ruler of the village was the Kathi Darbar, Uga Khuman. He was opposed to Satsang because of his exposure to hostile words uttered by ascetics. When he came to know that some sadhus of Swaminarayan had come to his village, he ordered his men, "Drive the sadhus away. Tell the children to hurl dung and stones at them so that they never again set foot in this village."

Under the orders of Uga Khuman, his servants stopped the sadhus from collecting alms, and ordered them to leave. As the sadhus began to leave, the servants made children hurl dung, stones, etc. at the sadhus, and also beat them. However, the sadhus did not utter a word nor did they wish any ill.

Krupanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami and other sadhus, who harboured no enmity and would not even hurt an ant, came out of the village chanting the name of Maharaj and sat under the shade of a tree on the river bank. How great was their tolerance! Words may be tolerated; but how could such humiliation and physical violence be tolerated?

Gālidānam tādanam cha krutam kumati bhirjanaihi,
Kshantavyameva sarvesham chintaniyam hitam cha taihi.

"When the wicked insult or beat them, the sadhus must forgive them and wish them well."

- Shikshapatri: 201

These sadhus observed this order of Maharaj fully.

People of the village, who were on their way to fetch water, saw this. So they talked among themselves, “The Darbar is so cruel that he has insulted these poor sadhus by driving them out of the village. It is thus obvious that God would not give him a son.”

The sadhus heard this. Swami thought that the ruler was hostile out of misunderstanding, and so asked the others to make a resolve that he be blessed with a son who becomes a *satsangi* and invites them to the *darbar*. Krupanand Swami and other sadhus liked this idea very much. So, together they prayed to Maharaj. All the sadhus were happy to note Swami’s pure intentions. In this way, after blessing Uga Khuman, the group of sadhus left for another village.

14. ‘Our Tilak’

After some time Krupanand Swami arrived at Panchala. At that time Maharaj was also there. All the groups of sadhus had come there to celebrate the festival of Fuldol. Once, Maharaj gave a small yellow sandalwood-like piece to all the sadhus and instructed them to do a *tilak*.

The next day, Maharaj did not see *tilak* marks on anybody’s forehead. When Maharaj asked for an explanation, everyone asked, “What should we make it with.” Maharaj reminded them that he had given a yellow clay piece on the previous day. All the sadhus were embarrassed to hear this because they had eaten it, considering it to be *prasad* from Maharaj!

So Maharaj again distributed a piece to each of them. On the next day everybody had applied different shapes and sizes of *tilaks*. On seeing this Maharaj was amused. Then Maharaj himself, with his own hand, applied a very good *tilak* on the forehead of Gunatitanand Swami and put a round *chandlo* in the middle of that *tilak* with kumkum. Then, showing Swami to everyone he addressed all the sadhus, “This is our *tilak*,” and added, “there is no God superior to me and there is no sadhu to match him.” In this way Maharaj conveyed to others his own matchless identity as Purushottam and the special identity of Swami as Akshar. The sadhus inclined towards having spiritual glory grasped the essence of Maharaj’s words.

15. Union with the Almighty

Once, Maharaj was conducting an assembly in the Akshar Ordi. Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Shuk Muni, Mulji Brahmachari, and other sadhus were present. At that time Swami had gone with Krupanand Swami to the river Ghela for a bath. Here, while bathing, Swami’s foot got trapped in a crevice. It was difficult to free it. At that time Maharaj gave darshan and asked Swami to get it out slowly. Maharaj, at that precise moment, said the same words to others in the Akshar Ordi. Hearing such an irrelevant remark, Brahmanand Swami asked Maharaj about it.

Maharaj again said, “Please remove my foot otherwise it will break.”

Mulji Brahmachari asked, “Maharaj, you are sitting here on a cot, so how can your foot break?”

So Maharaj smiled and said, “The foot of my abode, Gunatit, was trapped in a crevice and was taken out with great difficulty.”

In this way Maharaj showed his oneness with his abode, Akshar (Gunatitanand Swami).

16. Subtle Austerity

Swami was totally indifferent to his body. He had trained his body to tolerate hardships. He would himself go to the villages for collecting alms for the group with which he was touring. From whatever he got, he would first feed the senior *sadguru* and other sadhus of the group and then he would eat whatever was left. Sometimes he had to go without food; but he would not let others know this. As such he used to half-starve his body. He used to tie a string round his waist in order to measure his waistline. If he felt that his waistline was increasing, he would observe a fast.

Once, on request from Mota Ramdas Swami, Maharaj sent Swami with him for touring. When they reached a village some of the sadhus came down with a fever, so they had to extend their stay in that village. The ailing sadhus could not take any food, so one of the devotees brought roasted pulses. Ramdas Swami gave them to all the ailing sadhus. But even after that, plenty were left. So, all the sadhus of the group ate them, but still one pound of pulses remained. All the sadhus had eaten to their capacity and could not eat anymore. So Ramdas Swami was worried about what to do with the left over pulses. Moreover, Maharaj had given instructions to not store anything and, therefore, the pulses could not be kept for later use. So Ramdas Swami again requested the sadhus, “It would be good if someone ate these pulses.”

At this juncture, Swami, who always half-starved himself, intervened and said, “If you wish I shall eat them.” And Swami finished them all.

Seeing this Ramdas Swami said, “O *sadhuram*! Do you starve yourself to this extent daily?” Swami used to remain hungry to that extent everyday.

* * *

Once, Maharaj arrived at Umreth after celebrating the Hari Navmi festival at Vartal. Here, at Nandram Thakar’s place, Maharaj served mango juice and chapattis in abundance to all the sadhus. After the meal, Maharaj held an assembly under the cool shade of a mango tree.

It was the month of Chaitra and so it was very hot. All the sadhus were feeling rather uncomfortable in the heat after having eaten such a heavy meal. To add to this Maharaj ordered, “Today you have had the food of a miser so stand up and sing bhajans together, so that you can easily digest the food.”

It was difficult even to sit. Who would stand up to sing kirtans? But Swami, who

was indifferent to his body, stood up. Seeing this Tadrupanand Swami also stood up. Swami had memorized about five hundred bhajans. He sung them one by one and everyone else repeated after him. In this way the singing of bhajans continued for about a couple of hours. By the grace of Maharaj the sky remained overcast, and soon after the assembly was over, it rained. Maharaj was pleased by Swami's singing and said, "It has rained because of your devotion."

17. Detachment

Thereafter, at the invitation of Queen Kushalkuvarba of Dharampur, Maharaj proceeded towards Dharampur in the company of Muktanand Swami and other sadhus and devotees. On the way Devanand Swami fell ill at Surat. He suffered from a bout of dysentery and was forced to stay behind. Now the problem arose as to who would stay behind to nurse him, since nobody was prepared to forego the benefit of travelling with Maharaj.

On such occasions, Maharaj always looked to Swami. So Maharaj said, "Where is our Nirgunanand? Call him. He will abide by my orders."

Swami stayed behind according to the wish of Maharaj, and Maharaj left for Dharampur. As per his nature, Swami nursed Devanand Swami affectionately. Devanand Swami soon recovered and he was pleased with the services of Swami and said, "You have served me very well. I am very pleased and I wish to give you this *dagli* which has been sanctified by Maharaj; and I also wish to teach you music."

But Swami was detached and disinterested in anything except earning the pleasure of Maharaj, and therefore he politely declined the offer and said, "I have served you to please Maharaj. Moreover, I may not be able to properly preserve Maharaj's *dagli,* so it is better that it remains with you. Also, it would not be convenient for me to abandon my meditation on Maharaj in the morning in order to pursue learning music." In this way Swami politely convinced Devanand Swami and went to Maharaj at Dharampur.

* * *

Once Maharaj arrived at Sanjaya after celebrating the festival of Chaitra Punam at Vartal. Here, he ordered Swami to form a group of sadhus and travel for the spread of Satsang in the surrounding villages. But Swami remained silent. Then Maharaj himself formed a group of four sadhus for Swami. At that time sadhus used to travel alone because there was no rule for a companion sadhu. But Swami always moved with a companion sadhu.

18. Defeat of Vedantis

After the devotees who had come for the festival had dispersed, the devotees of Mahemdavad requested Maharaj, "Please send a learned sadhu to our village to defeat

the Vedantis and spread Satsang."

Mahemdavad was a stronghold of Vedanti Brahmins. They prevented people from becoming *satsangis* by using their pseudo-knowledge of Vedant philosophy. Maharaj tried to send a learned sadhu but nobody was prepared to go. At last He ordered Swami to go with the devotees to Mahemdavad.

When the Vedanti Brahmins of the village heard of Swami's arrival, they came to the mandir to defeat him in debate. Soon, there was a large congregation in the mandir. Swami addressed them, "Pundits! You have merely theoretical knowledge of Brahman, and have learnt only to repeat, *'Aham Brahmāsmi'*. But you have neither achieved the *brahmic* state nor have you realized God. Shukdevji had attained the *brahmic* state and was thus above material attractions and passion for women. Shukdevji possessed the all-pervading *brahmic* energy and, therefore, when Vyasji called him he replied through a tree. If you have attained a similar *brahmic* state, come here and reply to me from this pillar.

"But you have not attained that *brahmic* state. Your mundane desires have not gone yet. You indulge in numerous ploys even for a penny. You have many friends and enemies. Your ego has not yet dissolved. Also, you have not lost the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. You have not attained equilibrium in good or bad taste. For you, a delicate and a rough touch do not mean the same thing. You are still fascinated by attractive material objects. A sweet sound still charms your ears. So, you repeat the phrase *'Aham Brahmāsmi'* like a parrot, but you can't be called Brahman.

Na hi svātmārāmam vishayamrugatrushnā bhramayati.

'Sensuous pleasures, which are like a mirage, cannot lead one who is a knower of *atma* astray.'

"When you attain that state, you will not have to tell others 'I am *brahman*'. People will automatically come to know that. Shukji or Jad Bharat never went around telling everyone. But the world knew of their *brahmic* state. Where there is incompleteness, there is ego. So as long as you merely utter *'Aham Brahmasmi'*, you are incomplete, and you worship only the letters and not the spirit behind them. Shri Krishna has said in the Bhagvad Gita:

Atmaupamyena sarvatra samam pashyati yoarjuna;
Sukham vā yadi vā dukham sa yogi paramo matah.

'O Arjun, one who, like he sees himself, sees everyone equally in matters of happiness or misery, that *yogi* is superior.'

"Have you attained that state? Do you have a desire to share the happiness as well as the woes of others? When somebody's son dies you preach to him the knowledge of Brahman, but when your goat dies, you shout and cry.

"The false knowledge of such hypocritical pundits will no longer survive. Swaminarayan himself is Parabrahman and many have become, are becoming and will continue to become *brahman* by worshipping him. So after shedding all your hypocrisy, if you really wish to attain the *brahmic* state, I can take you to Parabrahman. You may read or contemplate on many shastras but you'll never attain the *brahmic* state, unless you surrender yourselves to Parabrahman Paramatma Swaminarayan. And I am the

eternal Brahman sustaining the innumerable cosmos."

As soon as Swami had finished his statement, floods of divine light emanated from his body. The pseudo-pundits who were sitting there were dazzled. The building in which Swami was sitting began to shake as if life had come into it. The pundits were frightened and thought that the house might collapse. On seeing their anxious faces, Swami smiled and said, "Don't be afraid. It won't collapse. If you are *brahman*, absorb this light."

Then, Swami himself absorbed the light in order to pacify them.

All of them cried, "You are indeed Brahman!" Then Swami said, "I am indeed Brahman, but Swaminarayan is Parabrahman. So if you are convinced, come for his darshan."

Some of them were so impressed with Swami's divine power that they touched his feet and became his disciples. Some of them felt defeated and went home. But from then on they were convinced that 'among the sadhus of Swaminarayan there is certainly a divine genius.'

19. Absorbed in the Murti of Maharaj

During his travels, Swami came to Gadhada. Here, Maharaj was breaking his fast of the eleventh day of the bright half of Ashadh. He was eating *khichdi* and yogurt in the room of Vasudev Narayan. All the sadhus who were sitting there wished for some *prasad* from Maharaj. Only Gunatitanand Swami was engrossed in the darshan of Maharaj without any such expectation. The all-knowing Maharaj knew that Swami was standing there, not for *prasad*, but for the darshan of his *murti*. So, Maharaj called Swami and expressed his joy by giving him *prasad* from his *thal*. All the sadhus thus experienced the unique mutual tie of affection between Swami and Maharaj.

During this time discourses on *Ramanuj Bhashya,* a commentary on the Bhagvad Gita, were being held in Akshar Ordi in the presence of Maharaj and other senior *sadgurus*. Once, the *purani* delivered a brilliant discourse, so Maharaj embraced him. Seeing this Brahmanand Swami said in a lighter vein, "You can't be so partial. You should embrace everyone present here in the discourse."

The news spread that Maharaj would embrace all; so the next day there was a large audience in the discourse. Then Maharaj asked Nityanand Swami, "Everyone has come to the discourse, but ask how many of them understand it?"

After the discourse Nityanand Swami asked everyone, and those who did not understand anything were requested not to come the next day. He asked Swami also. Swami passionately replied, "Oh! What a discourse! It is unparalleled." So Swami was permitted to come.

Thereafter Muktanand Swami asked Swami, "Do you really understand it?"

Then Swami replied in the same passionate tone, "I am attracted only by the darshan of Maharaj."

Seeing such yearning for darshan, Muktanand Swami was happy.

20. Infinite Faith

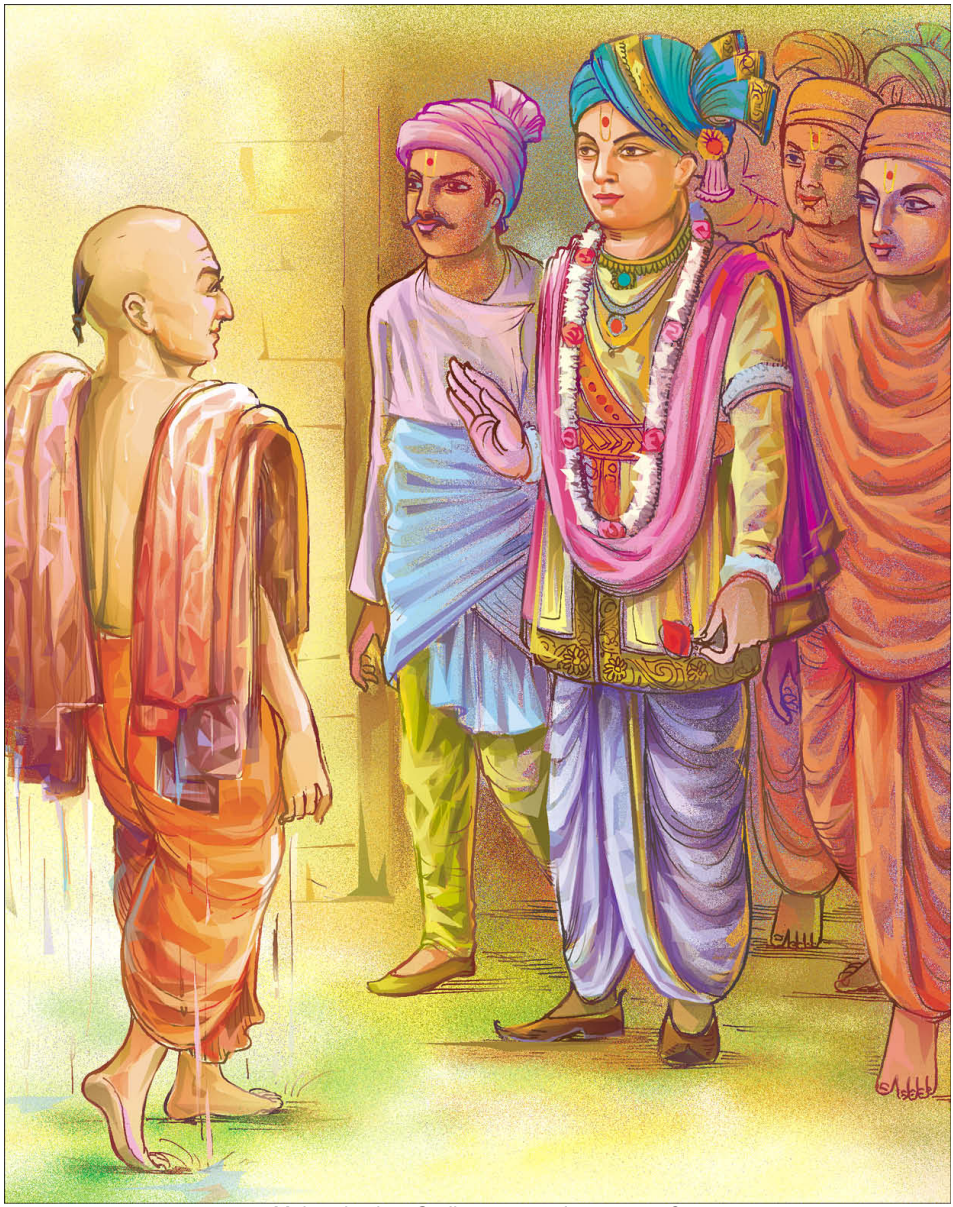
Gunatitanand Swami runs backwards to have darshan of Maharaj

Swami, the manifest form of Brahman, travelled to reveal the true identity of Purushottam Narayan to numerous *jivas* and to help them overcome *maya*. In every event of his life it is easy to discern his singular devotion towards Shriji Maharaj.

Once, on his way from Gadhada to Vartal, Maharaj arrived at Barwala with a group of sadhus and devotees. Here, devotees offered ladoos to Maharaj and his group. Swami also got one ladoo as his share, but he was not interested in it. He was totally engrossed in the *murti* of Maharaj and craved for his darshan every minute. Compared to his enjoyment of the *murti* of Maharaj, the joys of other worldly pleasures did not interest him. When Maharaj travelled from one village to another he often went on horseback. So to have his darshan Swami would have to run. Moreover, according to the rules, a sadhu could not go alone. Therefore, he would have to have the company of another sadhu who would be prepared to run with him.

So Swami requested one sadhu, "I wish to run with the horse in order to have the darshan of Maharaj. If you'll give me company in running I'll give you my ladoo." The sadhu was tempted by the offer and consented. In this way, Swami ran backwards through hedges, fields, thorns, etc. without caring for his body, remaining constantly engaged in Maharaj's darshan. Such was the yearning of Swami for Maharaj's darshan!

21. Eternal Servant



Maharaj asks, "Sadhuram, can I move now?"

Once, under Maharaj's instructions, Swami stayed at Vartal in the service of some ailing sadhus. He used to cook according to their individual tastes, render service to them and even washed their quilts. Seeing this, some of the healthy sadhus, too, gave their quilts to Swami to wash. In this way the total went up to about eighteen quilts. Once, Swami washed them in the river Gomti and was returning to the mandir carrying them on his shoulders. Water from the quilts and perspiration due to exertion were

running down his body. Precisely at that moment, Maharaj arrived at the Hanuman Gate of the mandir after taking lunch at Vasan Suthar's house. Swami stopped and became engrossed in darshan, looking straight into Maharaj's eyes. Maharaj, too, tied by the string of Swami's affection, stood there.

A little while later Maharaj asked, "Sadhuram, can I move now?" Maharaj sought Swami's permission. So Swami withdrew his gaze. Then Maharaj arrived in the assembly but appeared restless. Seeing his discomfort, some of the attendants began to fan him and somebody brought a glass of water. But Maharaj said, "I don't want anything, but that sadhu has put a lot of burden on my shoulders. So please take it off." In this way Maharaj revealed his union with Swami.

On hearing this Bhaguji ran and took off the quilts from the shoulders of Swami and placed them near Maharaj. Maharaj called the owners of the quilts. The ailing sadhus came forward and took their quilts, but the healthy ones felt ashamed and did not come.

Thereafter, Maharaj held an assembly and called Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and others and asked them, "What type of sadhu is this Gunatitanand Swami?"

"He is a very good sadhu, he knows many kirtans by heart and also delivers discourses. He renders very good service and observes many austerities," replied the *sadgurus.*

"These virtues described by you are only his external qualities. But in fact he is a very able sadhu. Just as a snake is caught in pincers he has caught my form in all the three states," said Maharaj.

One hearing this, the Hindustani sadhu, Mahanubhavanand Swami, rebuked, "Why have you caught Maharaj? Leave him."

Then Maharaj explained to him, "He has caught me forever. But that does not make me miserable. However, it is not possible for others to catch my form like he has. This sadhu has been serving me since eternity. It will be only through this sadhu that my supreme worship will be spread in the entire Satsang. Nobody knows my wonderful glory as much as he knows. So is it proper that healthy sadhus should extract work from him?"

In this way, Maharaj explained the glory of Gunatitanand Swami to all the *sadgurus*.

Before this incident took place, Muktanand Swami used to give *prasad* to Swami from his eating bowl, but after this incident he understood the glory of Swami and stopped the practice, despite Swami's insistence to continue.

* * *

Once, Swami arrived at Samadhiyala along with Krupanand Swami. Here, Swami instructed Vira Sheladia's son, Lakshman, to ask one question everyday and Swami used to reply to that question. On one such occasion, while replying to a question by Lakshman, Swami referred to the infinite glory of Maharaj. Swami became engrossed in Maharaj's *murti* and subsequently so much light emanated from his body that Lakshman was dazzled. In the midst of the light he saw Maharaj instead of Swami. So he began to touch the holy feet of Maharaj to his chest. Swami asked him, "Lakshman, what are you doing?"

Lakshman replied, “I am touching the holy feet of Maharaj to my chest. This is Maharaj. Where are you, Swami?”

All those present were surprised. When they shook Lakshman and asked him, he narrated his experience in reply. In this way, everyone was convinced about the fact that Maharaj was manifest in Swami.

Swami used to travel extensively in the Sorath region and revealed the true identity of Maharaj. Swami used to say many times, “I and Krupanand Swami have moved from field to field and inspired satsang in everybody. False beliefs or superstitions have never been able to enter at the places where we have moved and spread satsang.”

22. Beginning of Mandir at Junagadh

Jhinabhai Darbar of Panchala dedicated his *darbar* and farm in Junagadh to Maharaj, with a request to build a mandir there. After Jhinabhai’s death Maharaj held an assembly at Gadhada and proposed to everyone about building a mandir in Junagadh. Nobody was prepared to go there because of the problems posed by the Nagar Brahmins. Then, with the instruction of Maharaj, Swami was ready to go. Brahmanand Swami accompanied him with a view to help him in the liaison work with the government. The foundation stone of the Junagadh mandir was laid at the hands of Gunatitanand Swami on 10 May 1826 (Vaishakh *sud* 3, Samvat 1882), in the presence of Gopalanand Swami and other *sadgurus*. In this way, a beginning was made for a magnificent mandir – a centre for *brahmavidya*.

After some time, along with Anand Swami, Swami arrived at Gadhada to have darshan of Maharaj. After a few days Maharaj ordered him to go back to Junagadh, because nobody was prepared to go and face the hardships in Junagadh. Maharaj instructed Tattvanand Swami to go with Swami. Before going to Junagadh Swami approached Maharaj for permission to leave. Maharaj was having a shave. When Swami prostrated before Maharaj, he stood up and asked the barber to stop shaving. He then embraced Swami and said, “You are going to Junagadh so take this…” Then he recited the verse:

Nirgun Brahma sulabh ati, sagun na jāne koi,
Sagun charitra nānāvidhi, suni muni man bhram hoi.

“Today, Brahman who is above the *gunas* is present here. But worldly souls cannot recognize his manifestation, because even the great *munis* doubt on seeing his human actions.”

Then, Maharaj placed his own *pagh* on Gunatitanand Swami’s head and showered his immense affection.

23. Maharaj Became His Surety

After the Prabodhini festival of 1827 CE (Samvat 1883), Maharaj gathered all *paramhansas* in the Akshar Ordi and held an assembly. Brahmanand Swami had come from Junagadh, but Swami for some reason could not come in time. Maharaj addressed all the sadhus, "All of you should strictly observe the moral vows. However, give me an assurance that there will be no lapse on your part by becoming mutual sureties."

So, all the sadhus became sureties for one another. Precisely at this time Swami arrived from Junagadh and came straight to the Akshar Ordi for Maharaj's darshan. Seeing him, Brahmanand Swami said, "Here comes Gunatitanand Swami. But now who will become his surety? All those sitting here have become sureties for one another. Now there is nobody."

On hearing this Maharaj said, "Swami! I am his constant surety." On hearing this, the entire assembly was astonished. All could see that Swami enjoyed the undivided affection of Shriji Maharaj.

24. Appointment As Mahant of Junagadh

Thereafter, Maharaj arrived in Vartal. Brahmanand Swami had also arrived there from Junagadh. Maharaj gathered all the sadhus and devotees and addressed them, "For each of the mandirs that we have established a mahant should be appointed. This is what I have decided: Aksharanand Swami as the mahant of Vartal mandir, Vaishnavanand Swami as the mahant of Bhuj, Viraktanand Swami as the mahant of Gadhada, Sarvagnanand Swami as the mahant of Ahmedabad, Adbhutanand Swami as the mahant of Dholera and Aniruddhanand Swami as the mahant of Dholka." Thereafter, Maharaj instructed Brahmanand Swami, "Build a mandir in Muli and then appoint Tadrupanand Swami as the mahant."

Brahmanand Swami then cautioned Maharaj, "Please be careful in appointing the mahant of Junagadh since it is a Muslim state, the Nagar officers are followers of Shiv and oppose others, and people of the region are poor and rough."

Maharaj said, "Fine."

Maharaj arrived at Gadhada on the occasion of the festival of Chaitra Punam. Swami had come from Junagadh. During a spiritual assembly, Maharaj called Brahmanand Swami and reminded him of the unfinished talk that they had had at Vartal. Maharaj said, "Today I want to appoint the mahant of Junagadh, so call Nirgunanand of Bhadra."

When Swami came, Maharaj asked him to sit near Muktanand Swami. Then Maharaj stood up and went to him and garlanded Swami with all the garlands he himself was wearing and said, "Now he is the mahant of Junagadh."

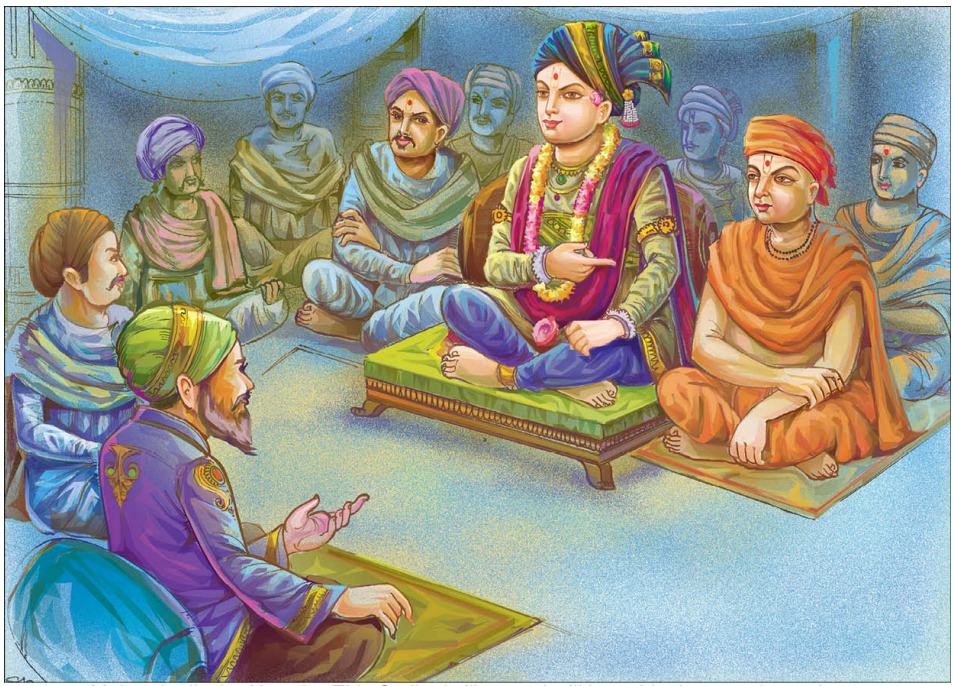
Swami was perplexed and hesitant in accepting the new position. Swami's close friend, Gopalanand Swami, then advised him, "Maharaj has given the garlands with joy, so keep them."

Then Maharaj recommended, "Gopalanand Swami will look after your

administrative affairs and Akhandanand Brahmachari and Parmanand Swami will also assist you."

On this occasion, Maharaj gave all his ornaments to Swami and put his own *pagh* on Swami's head, and gave his blessings.

25. My Akshardham, Your Gift



Maharaj tells the Nawab, "This Sadhu is like me. I will keep him here as the mahant."

Kurji Dave of Piplana was present in this assembly in Gadhada. Maharaj addressed him, and said, "When Ramanand Swami arrived at Piplana from Bhuj, you had come to Loj to convey his message to Muktanand Swami.

"At that time, as a reward for the good news you had brought, Muktanand Swami had given you a fine cloth used for tying on his head. Then I had told you, 'Right now I don't have anything to give you, so what shall I give you? I will give you my Akshardham as a gift. Do you remember this?' "

Kurji Dave replied, "Yes, Maharaj." He was pleased and felt that Maharaj would give him something.

Maharaj then smiled and said, "This Gunatitanand Swami is my Akshardham. I give him to you as a gift. I have not been able to grant my happiness to the devotees of Sorath and therefore, I give this Sadhu to you. He is my Akshardham and he is my everything. So your mission will be accomplished if you serve him properly and remain in his company."

Thereafter, Maharaj looked at Swami and blessed him, “Whoever comes to Junagadh and renders his services according to your wishes, I will relieve him of his failings of hundreds and thousands of births in this very birth.”

In this way Maharaj appointed Swami as the mahant of Junagadh on 11 April 1827 (Chaitra Punam Samvat 1883), expressing his infinite happiness and blessings on him.

* * *

The work of Junagadh mandir was on the verge of completion. The Nagars had raised many obstacles but by the grace of Maharaj the mandir was successfully completed.

On 1 May 1828 (Vaishakh *vad* 2, Samvat 1884) the *murtis* of Shri Radha-Raman Dev were ceremoniously consecrated. Thereafter, Maharaj instructed all the devotees, “I will relieve the lapses of ten million births of whoever comes here to remain in the spiritual company of Swami for one month every year.” Then he advised Gopalanand Swami, “You should come and stay here for one month of every year. If you are not able to come here during one year, then stay for two months the following year.”

According to this order, Gopalanand Swami, Atmanand Swami (senior) and Nityanand Swami came to Junagadh every year to stay in the company of Swami.

On this occasion the Nawab of Junagadh came to Maharaj for darshan and requested him, “When the documents for the mandir land were being prepared you had agreed that you would stay here, so please stay here forever.”

Then Maharaj asked him, “Should I stay myself or should I keep someone like me?”

The Nawab folded his hands and replied, “Only God is like God Himself.”

Then Maharaj looked at Swami and told the Nawab, “This Sadhu is like me. He is capable of doing what I can do. I will keep him here as the mahant.”

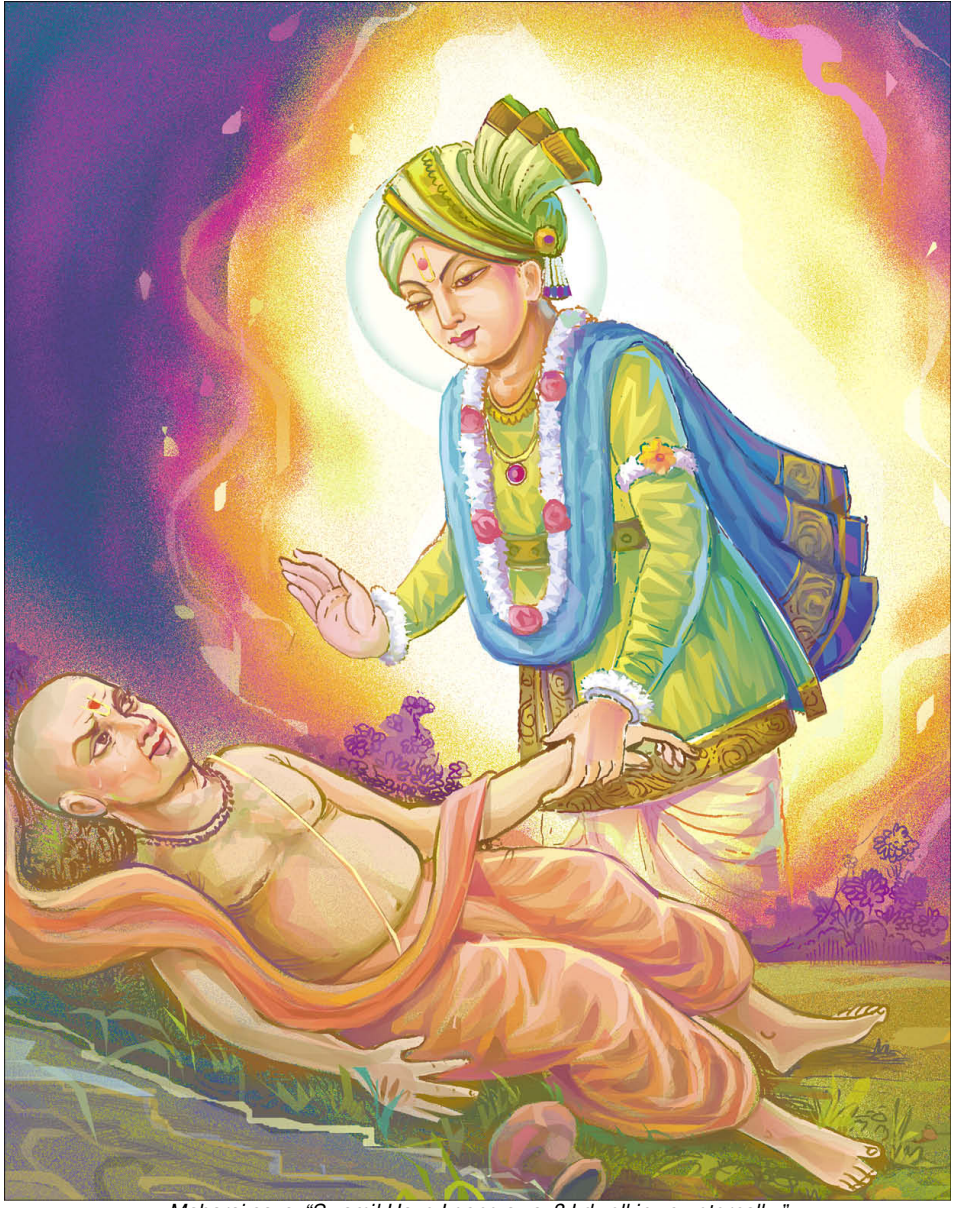
The Nawab was pleased and said, “Then it is alright.”

* * *

On the occasion of the Janmashtmi festival on 1 September 1828 (Samvat 1885), Swami came to Gadhada. Maharaj was in the Akshar Ordi. Swami went there and prostrated before Maharaj. Shuk Muni was sitting near Maharaj, writing a letter. When Swami came in, he got up to get something. So Maharaj asked him the reason for getting up. He replied, “I am looking for a seat for the mahant of Junagadh.”

On hearing this, Maharaj smiled and said, “His greatness does not lie either in the mahantship or in a seat; he is great since eternity.” Shuk Muni was overwhelmed to hear about the greatness of Swami from the very lips of Maharaj.

26. “I Dwell in You Eternally…”



Maharaj says, "Swami! Have I gone away? I dwell in you eternally."

Even in his final years on earth, Maharaj showed everybody how he was in union with this supreme Sadhu who was his abode. During his illness, Maharaj kept Brahmanand Swami with him for two months and blessed him with divine bliss. When Maharaj decided to return to his divine abode, he instructed Brahmanand Swami, "Go to Junagadh and send Gunatitanand Swami from there." Maharaj did so because he had promised Swami that he would certainly send for him before leaving for his abode.

Brahmanand Swami found it very difficult to part from Maharaj under such distressing conditions, but he had to obey the orders and go.

When Brahmanand Swami reached Junagadh, Swami was already awaiting for

Maharaj's order. On getting the message, he immediately left for Gadhada. He reached Gadhada on 28 May 1830 (Jeth *sud* 6, Samvat 1886). Nobody was allowed to go near Maharaj as he was seriously ill. But Maharaj had instructed Sura Khachar to allow Gunatitanand Swami to come to him. When Swami arrived he was taken to Maharaj. While having the darshan of Maharaj, tears flowed from Swami's eyes. He prostrated to Maharaj and then sat on the floor near Maharaj's bed. Maharaj and Swami looked into each other's eyes. Maharaj addressed Swami and said:

Mithā vhālā kem visaro māru tamthi bāndhel tan ho,
Tarsyāne jem pānidu vhālu, bhukhyāne bhojan ho…
Mithā vhālā…

"O my dearest, how can I forget you? I am bound by you, I pine for you just as a thirsty man yearns for water and a hungry man for food."

Swami also responded with similar sentiments. Thereafter, Maharaj enquired about things in Junagadh.

Maharaj had resolved to go to his divine abode. But before that he called Gopalanand Swami and recommended to him, "I have appointed you as a senior of both the regions. But please pay special attention to my Akshardham Gunatitanand Swami and Raghuvirji who are intensely attached to me."

He also instructed Gunatitanand Swami, "I do not want to stay in this world any longer. But you should spread my full glory and grant divine bliss to all our devotees."

Thus, on 1 June 1830 (Jeth *sud* 10, Samvat 1886), Maharaj departed to his abode of his own will by using his *yogic* powers. There was mourning all around. Gopalanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami consoled everyone. The funeral rites of Maharaj were performed at Lakshmi Vadi.

Thereafter, Gunatitanand Swami went to answer a call of nature and on returning, he saw green grass swaying near a stream. On seeing this Swami thought, "Oh! Water is the life of this grass. See how green it is. Similarly, Maharaj was our life, but now he has gone." While these thoughts were running through his mind, Swami became unconscious and fell down.

Suddenly, Maharaj appeared in a divine form, brought Swami back to consciousness, and said, "Swami! Have I gone away? I dwell in you eternally." Having said this Maharaj disappeared.

Gunatitanand Swami, who was feeling unhappy by the departure of Maharaj, felt overjoyed by the darshan of Maharaj. And thereafter he engaged himself in spreading *ekantik* dharma according to the orders of Maharaj.

27. Swami's Devotees

In the Sorath region there were innumerable devotees groomed by Swami who lived according to the wishes of Shriji Maharaj.

Due to the scarcity of rains, the year's harvest was poor. The devotees of Sorath had

great affection for Swami and so Karsan Bambhaniya of Hamapar village was worried. He collected all the ornaments from his house in a box, came to Junagadh and placed the box at the feet of Swami, saying, "Swami, this year the monsoon is weak and as a result of this the sadhus will not be able to travel in the regions. Moreover, as the harvest is poor, devotees will be unable to offer alms. So, accept this box of ornaments and make the necessary arrangements to feed the sadhus."

Seeing his devotion and spirit Swami was delighted, but he advised him, "By the grace of Maharaj the mandir is not facing any problem, so you keep the box and use it."

This reply of Swami brought tears to the eyes of Karsan Bambhaniya, since he felt that Swami has not accepted his services. So he again beseeched Swami to accept it. Sensing his affection Swami kept the box as a deposit. The following year, as there was plenty of rain, Swami called Karsan Bambhaniya and persuaded him to take back his box. In this way, Swami looked after his devotees. And the devotees were also prepared to dedicate whatever they had to Swami.

When the *murti-pratishtha* at Junagadh had taken place, Maharaj had ordered all devotees to go to Junagadh for one month every year. Nishkulanand Swami noted this in the Bhaktachintamani:

Vali santne āpi āgnā re, rahevu nahi ahin āvyā vinā re,
Varso varas ek mās re, karvo ā mandir mā nivās re.

"The sadhus are instructed that they should not miss a chance to come here. Every year they should stay in this mandir for one month."

According to the orders of Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami spent one month in Junagadh every year during *chaturmas.* Whenever he came, Swami used to hand over all the administrative affairs to him and used to deliver discourses. Many sadhus and devotees came to listen to the discourses of Swami. These included: Hariharyanand Swami, Upendranand Swami, Tadrupanand Swami, Siddhanand Swami, Krishnacharandas Swami, Nirgundas Swami, Mukundcharandas Swami, Dharma-prasaddas Swami, Vrajvallabhdas Swami, Vrindavandas Swami, Bapu Ratan Swami, Kashidas of Bochasan, Bhanjibhai of Paliyad, Nathu Patel of Kariyani, Devrajbhai and Jivraj Seth of Daduka, Umedbhai Hargovind of Surat, Pitambar Fulchand of Ahmedabad, Vaghjibhai, Kashiram and Jagubhai of Vaso, Jeebhai Shelat and Karsanjibhai of Umreth, Bhudharbhai of Kapadvanj and others. The list of devotees who came from Sorath included: Mayaram Bhatt, Bechar Bhatt of Vanthali (Vaniyani), Kalyanbhai of Vanthali, Mulchandbhai and Manekchand Sheth of Mangrol, Meghabhai (the son of Parvatbhai), Govindram Bhatt, Lalabhai and Arjanbhai of Upleta, Arjan Babariyo, Bhojabhai of Bhayavadar, Ganeshji Sheth and Kalyanji Sheth of Una, Vallabhji Sheth, Jetha Sheth and others.

28. "Only He Can Change My Words!"

Once Swami told the *parshads* to go to the hills to cut grass. The *parshads* got ready with sickles and were ready to leave when Gopalanand Swami met them on the way. He looked at the sky and said, “Clouds have gathered on the Bhensla hill and it will rain heavily. So don’t go for cutting the grass.”

When the *parshads* were returning to the mandir, Swami met them and enquired about the reason for their return. The *parshads* talked about the imminent rains, so Swami said, “Thakorji likes cow’s milk only, and if the cows don’t eat green grass how will they give milk? So, go. It won’t rain now. It will rain later.”

The *parshads* left and returned to the mandir after some time with several bales of grass. Seeing them again, Gopalanand Swami enquired, “Why did you go despite my instructions not to go?” So the *parshads* told him about the orders of Gunatitanand Swami. On hearing this Gopalanand Swami smiled, shook his head and said, “Oh! This is the work of Jogi. Only he can change my words.” And with these words, as he entered the assembly hall, it began to rain heavily outside.

* * *

At Junagadh, Swami tirelessly delivered spiritual discourses. Swami had but a single noble purpose and that was to cultivate faith in everyone regarding the supreme form of Shriji Maharaj. One can become *brahmarup* only through the company of eternal Brahman. And it is only after becoming *brahmarup* that one is entitled to worship Purushottam. Swami never allowed a gap in his discourses, since he wanted to make everyone *brahmarup*. In order to spread Satsang, Swami used to go on extensive excursions in the Sorath region around Junagadh.

Every year he used to go to Vartal to celebrate a festival. On the way, devotees used to come about five kilometres from their village to welcome him. Through Swami, everyone enjoyed the divine pleasure that matched that of the darshan and company of Shriji Maharaj. Sadhus and devotees used to come up to Mahelav to welcome Swami as he approached Vartal. Such was the affection of the entire Satsang for Gunatitanand Swami.

29. Gunatit Discourses

In the festival assembly at Vartal, Gopalanand Swami and Nityanand Swami let only Swami talk. Whenever Swami discoursed about Maharaj as Purushottam, Gopalanand Swami used to rejoice and say, “Oh! Swami is Aksharbrahman incarnate, so the shastras cannot confine him.”

Whenever Swami talked on renunciation, observance of strict religious rules and other topics by citing references from the Dharmamrut, Nishkam Shuddhi, Shikshapatri, Vachanvidhi, Chosathpadi, and other shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya many sadhus were inspired in their renunciation and renounced the six different types of taste. This made Nityanand Swami very happy and he used to say, “Nishkulanand Swami has severed the roots of the five sense pleasures by writing

shastras, and Gunatitanand Swami does it by his discourses."

In this way Swami was considered to be matchless in the entire Satsang for spreading faith in Shriji Maharaj and *ekantik* dharma in the form of bhakti, *jnan, vairagya* and *swadharma.* Everyone could visualize Shriji Maharaj in Swami due to his elevated spiritual state and constant communion with Maharaj.

In the rainy season Nityanand Swami had come to Junagadh to remain in the company of Swami. But Swami made him talk in the assemblies. So once Nityanand Swami told him, "I have come here to listen to your discourses and you are keeping yourself busy with the mandir affairs."

Swami said, "My discourses are such that they would not suit everyone."

Nityanand Swami said, "You are a Jogi, so your discourses are suitable for everybody."

Then Swami replied with the following anecdote: "In my pre-initiation days I had gone to Jodia to buy a pair of bullocks to use on the farm. One old woman had a pair of bullocks. One cost sixty *koris* and the other only thirty *koris.* Both the bullocks were white and similar in other respects and yet there was a difference in price. So I enquired about the reason. The old woman replied, 'The costlier one has been raised in my presence. He would never shirk, however much burden it has to carry, and the less costly one was purchased by me from someone else and therefore I can't vouchsafe for it.' I purchased the pair from her. So she bowed to the bullock which she had raised in her presence and requested him, 'Do not put me to shame.' Similarly, Shriji Maharaj, without regard for day and night, has explained to us his glory through his discourses. Besides that, he has also blessed us with his darshan and *prasad.* So now we should try not to shirk from his *upasana* and moral instructions, and if we do so he would be put to shame." In this way Swami discoursed about many things and Nityanand Swami was extremely pleased to listen to them.

30. Spreading the Glory of Aksharbrahman in Satsang

It was around this time that Gopalanand Swami was on his way to Junagadh. He made a brief stay at Gadhada. Here, during the course of his discourses in the assembly he said, "Maharaj appointed mahants for different mandirs, but it must be said that the mahant of Junagadh, Gunatitanand Swami, has stolen a march over others for the reason that he completed the work of the mandir despite obstacles from the Nagar Brahmins; bettered the mandir management and increased its popularity, and spread the Satsang in the whole of Sorath. He has inspired the sadhus to observe their moral rules sincerely, pleased Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj and, above all, he has never forgotten even for a moment the form of Maharaj while delivering spiritual discourses. So there is no *sadguru* like him in the entire Satsang. He is omniscient, omnipotent and is like Dhanvantar *vaidya.*"

After some time Gopalanand Swami reached Junagadh to celebrate the festival of

Janmashtmi. After breaking his fast of Janmashtmi the next day, he addressed an assembly of sadhus and devotees, “All of you do not yet know the true identity of Swami. Maharaj himself told me his glory, that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar.” After saying this, he called the devotees of Bhadra – Dosabhai, Ratnabhai and Vashram Suthar – and told them to relate the incident in Bhadra when Maharaj himself had, for the first time, talked about the glory of Swami. In this way Gopalanand Swami used to spread the infinite glory of Swami.

* * *

After the departure of Maharaj to Akshardham, Naja Jogia had become a sadhu and had been named Ghanshyamdas. He was impressed by Swami’s discourses in Vartal so he used to come to Junagadh to associate with Swami. But so far he had not been able to realize the true glory of Swami. Once, Ghanshyamdas was meditating in the assembly hall. Swami was sitting nearby. After some time Swami told him, “Are you meditating or just bungling?”

“Swami, that is an unfair allegation,” said Ghanshyamdas as he awoke from meditation.

Swami smiled in reply and said, “Were you meditating, or stroking the buffalo with a white spot in Gadhada?”

Ghanshyamdas was stunned when he heard this. During his meditation he really had been stroking the buffalo in Gadhada; so he stood up humbly, touched Swami’s feet and said in an emotional tone, “Swami! In the inner recesses of my heart I was under the impression that you were merely like a feudal chief but today I have realized that you are an emperor and the form of Maharaj incarnate. You really are Akshar.” Swami smiled and blessed him.

Swami had arrived in Vartal on the occasion of the Chaitra Punam festival. Both *acharyas* had also come there. In the assembly Gopalanand Swami and other senior *sadgurus* garlanded Swami. Swami’s neck was full of garlands. Seeing this Malji Soni of Bhoika asked his guru, Gopalanand Swami, “Who is this *sadguru?*”

Gopalanand Swami replied, “Hadn’t I told you that I’ll show you Akshardham. This Gunatitanand Swami is Akshardham incarnate. So know him properly.”

On hearing this Malji Soni was convinced about the identity of Swami. (Shastriji Maharaj had met Malji Soni and had personally heard the above incident from him. After that Shastriji Maharaj took many aspirants to Malji Soni at Bhoika and made them listen to this incident.)

31. Dross Transformed into Gold

Munja Suru, a member of the bard community of Lilakha, near Gondal, had become sinful and violent. He never hesitated in killing anyone, and he indulged in eating meat and drinking wine. As such he was a member of the office of Darbar Mansinh of Mengani. It seemed that a spiritual inclination must have been hidden behind his

inhuman activities, because when Swami came to his village and called him, he came for Swami's darshan. But, he could not look directly into Swami's eyes since he felt ashamed. Then Swami preached to him, "Munja Suru! Are you aware of the fact that opium sends a man to hell for one *kalp*, bhang for three hundred *kalps,* and wine and meat for a thousand. Even Brahma would become impure if he were to consume intoxicants." In this way Swami talked about prohibition of meat and wine.

"Swami, it is the duty of we Kshatriyas to go out for hunting, to eat meat, and drink wine. All this advice of yours may be for Brahmins and Vanias, but we just hang these holy books on the shelves," replied Munja Suru as he looked up arrogantly.

Then as soon as Swami's gaze fell on him, he experienced samadhi. In samadhi, the servants of Yam took him to Yampuri (hell), and he saw for himself the terrible tortures and sufferings given to sinners. He shuddered at the sight. So Swami woke him up. Munja Suru repented and fell at Swami's feet and earnestly declared, "Swami, the misery of Yampuri is real. Have mercy on me so that I don't have to go there."

Swami replied with a smile, "If you accept the *vartman* and refuge of Shriji Maharaj, then your pain and misery will be pardoned." So he accepted the *vartman* and wore a *kanthi*. Thus, Munja Suru, who was a mountain of sin, became a devotee.

The transformation of Munja Suru pleased the shepherds because he used to carry away their goats and sheep everyday. Once, Swami made a night halt in the forest and was talking by the fireside. On learning of this, a shepherd came there and asked, "Are you the guru of Munja Suru?"

Swami replied positively with a smile. The shepherd fell at his feet and began to speak in a single breath, "You have obliged us a lot. Whenever Munja Suru entered our pens he used to carry away many of our goats and sheep. But ever since you have made him into a devotee his nuisance has stopped. You are a real sadhu. From today onwards you are my guru, too."

Swami initiated the shepherd into Satsang. He could not pronounce 'Swaminarayan' so he turned the beads of the *mala* by chanting 'Gunanand'.

* * *

There is a village called Mansa in Babariyawad. Two step-brothers named Valera Varu and Sidi Varu lived here. Sidi had usurped half of Valera's land and consequently Valera got very little harvest from his remaining land. He was fed up with this situation and turned to plundering as a means of livelihood.

Once, when Swami was passing through the forest of Gir, he came across some dacoits and gunmen. The sadhus and devotees were frightened, but Swami gave them courage. The dacoits took them to their den. Valera Varu was sitting there. Seeing the divinity on Swamishri's face, his gentle speech and compassionate eyes, Valera's heart melted. He fell at Swami's feet. Swami asked him to be patient and not to indulge in violence. He gave him blessings that he would get his land back within seven days. But Valera could not even count to seven. So Swami tied seven knots in a string and gave it to him, telling him to untie one knot everyday at sunrise. Then, to honour the wishes of Valera, the sadhus prepared *dudhpak*. Swami offered it to Thakorji, blessed Valera and moved on. Then exactly on the seventh day Sidi Varu was inspired and he came for a

compromise and returned the usurped land to Valera.

As a result of Swami's blessings, Valera struck upon an abundant reservoir of water on his land and subsequently reaped good harvests. Since he had firm refuge in Swami he used to come to Junagadh and give a clean share in donation. All the people of his community followed the religious practices of Tulsi-Shyam and donated a measure of grains there. They asked Valera to follow the rules of their community, but Valera made it clear, "I have surrendered to Swaminarayan and I am not afraid even if you excommunicate me from the community." In this way, Valera practiced satsang boldly and steadfastly.

* * *

As per the orders of Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami preached about the supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj in Satsang. Some people resented this. So Gopalanand Swami became sad and determined to return to Akshardham. When Shivlal Sheth of Botad heard the news he became unhappy and asked, "Swami, now who will guide us?"

To this Gopalanand Swami replied, "What sort of guidance do you need? If you wish to learn the ways of mundane affairs, then Punja Sheth of Gadhada knows them very well, and if you wish to learn the worldly as well as spiritual ways then you should go to Gunatitanand Swami at Junagadh. There is no sadhu who can match Swami. He is Mul Akshardham; so you, Pragji and Jaga Bhakta should all go to Junagadh."

Similarly, when devotees from Vadodara, Premanand Raiji and Bapu Raiji, requested Gopalanand Swami to come to Vadodara, he replied, "At this time one should focus one's mind either on Shriji Maharaj or towards the Jogi of Junagadh, Mul Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami."

As a result of this, many disciples of Gopalanand Swami went to Junagadh.

32. Great Glory

In 1855 CE (Samvat 1911) Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj had organized religious discourses at Vartal during the holy months of *chaturmas*. Groups of sadhus and devotees were invited from all over the country. Swami was also specially invited from Junagadh. On this occasion, Swami talked for about four-and-a-half months on Maharaj's true form as Purushottam and also denounced indulgence in sense pleasures. Some people did not like these stern talks of Swami, so Shuk Swami was made to address the assembly for some time. But Shuk Swami's voice was soft and he talked about the philosophical aspects of the shastras, so not all were interested in them. Meanwhile, Shriji Maharaj gave darshan to Raghuvirji Maharaj in a dream and said, "Why have you detained Swami here? If you wish to listen to his talks then keep him here, otherwise let him go to Junagadh."

So the next day Acharya Maharaj issued a mandate, "Only Swami will address the assembly and those who do not like it can go on a preaching tour to the villages."

Shuk Muni also offered his apologies to Swami and said, “I had sat here on the request of others.”

On this occasion, Swami talked about *ekantik* dharma and the supremacy of Maharaj. As a result of the discourses, devotees came to know the glory of Maharaj as well as Swami. After this event a belief spread that Swami was the incarnation of Aksharbrahman.

During the last few days of his stay in Vartal Swami also discoursed on the first floor of Acharya Maharaj’s residence. Once, after reading Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 9, Swami said, “According to this Vachanamrut it should be considered an abuse to Maharaj if he is equated with other incarnations, such as, Ram, Krishna, etc. But all this is very difficult to understand by oneself. The fact that Shriji Maharaj is Purushottam himself and he is the cause of all the incarnations can only be understood if explained by the great (Sadhu). No one can vie with Purushottam. So apart from the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj, remove everything else from your heart.”

On hearing this Shuk Muni said, “Maharaj had addressed this Vachanamrut to me, but only today have I understood the correct meaning of it. I had not understood it till I had climbed the stairs to this first floor.”

On hearing this Raghuvirji Maharaj smiled. Then, according to the wishes of Swami, he instructed Achintyanand Brahmachari to write a shastra describing the supreme form and divine exploits of Shriji Maharaj. With the blessings of Swami, the Brahmachari composed the wonderful scriptural text, called the Harililakalpataru.

* * *

After celebrating the festival of spring at Junagadh, Swami began his excursions in Sorath and arrived at Maliya village. He was accompanied by a large group of sadhus and devotees. Swami discoursed even while he walked. When they arrived near a neem tree in the village square, they found Rama Hati sitting there. Swami addressed him, “Rama! If ladoos and *sata-jalebis* are offered to a lion would it eat them?”

He replied, “No, Maharaj, it is not its food; it would eat only its food.”

Then Swami said, “If the animals do not eat human food, how is it that human beings eat the food of animals! So is it proper for a human being to eat forbidden food and consume forbidden drink?”

Rama Hati indulged in all these forbidden things. But these piercing, logical words of Swami penetrated through to his heart. Swami’s glance illuminated his heart. He folded his hands and said, “Swami, I shall henceforth abstain from all these things.” He took a pledge, accepted *vartman* from Swami and became a disciple.

After some time, Swami arrived at Vartal for the festival of Chaitra Punam. Nobody had forgotten the spiritual bliss that they had enjoyed for four-and-a-half months the previous year. As a result of that, this year innumerable devotees had flocked to listen to Swami’s discourses. Swami also delighted them with his spiritual talks.

After the festival, when Swami was about to leave for Junagadh, Raghuvirji Maharaj invited him to join him in his carriage. Swami joined him in order to please him. Then Raghuvirji Maharaj offered him a *pendo*. Holding the *pendo* in his hand, Swami said, “Five hundred *paramhansas* are holding me by the throat and saying,

‘Don’t eat that, it is poison.’ ”

Raghuvirji Maharaj then said, “Swami, if you live (with such intense detachment) like this, what will happen to us? Our attachments have not yet been overcome.”

Hearing this, Swami said, “Hand over your charge to Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj and come to Junagadh as a pilgrim. I’ll melt your base nature. If I do not melt your base nature and make you *gunatit,* then I am not Gunatit.” In this way, Swami gave a promise.

Hearing this Raghuvirji Maharaj said, “Swami, I am not Raghuvirji if I don’t come as a pilgrim to Junagadh.”

33. Humility

After the festival of Kartik Punam in 1857 CE (Samvat 1904) in Vartal, Swami arrived in Khambhat with a group of sadhus and devotees at the insistence of Kothari Ambavidas and other devotees of Khambhat. All the devotees came to receive Swami with a silver palanquin borrowed from the Nawab. Everyone begged Swami to sit in the palanquin, but Swami refused. The devotees insisted by saying, “Swami! The Nawab has a dislike for Hindus, and it will increase if you don’t sit in the palanquin, and he will think ill of you.”

Replying to this, Swami said, “It is not in his hands to see faults, but I’ll not sit in it.” Then Swami sat in an ordinary cart. On this occasion, all the town residents had the darshan of Swami and said, “Oh! He looks like a great Jogi. But the tattered mattress (he is sitting on) does not suit him.”

Hearing this Swami smiled and said, “Brother, this is a diamond wrapped in rags.”

The news that Swami did not sit in the silver palanquin reached the Nawab. So the Nawab asked, “Who is he? Where does he come from? How is it that he did not sit in the palanquin, but sat in a cart!”

Then somebody said, “Bapu, he is a great Girnari sadhu from Junagadh and spiritually he is a very powerful ascetic.”

Hearing this, the Nawab became curious and came for Swami’s darshan. During the conversation with the Nawab, Swami referred to many verses from the Koran. The Nawab was delighted and touched the feet of Swami. He offered *sutarfeni* to the sadhus and served Swami in many ways.

* * *

The mahant of Dholera, Swami Vasudevcharandas, was unhappy and frustrated due to some administrative problems. When Swami arrived at Dholera he felt peaceful with his darshan. He then unburdened himself before Swami. Swami invited him, “If you want peace, come with me to Junagadh.”

Thereafter, on arriving in Botad, Swami gave him a handful of sugarcane pieces which had been offered to Thakorji. After eating that *prasad* he felt partially at peace. Then he accompanied Swami to Gadhada and Una and finally arrived at Junagadh.

From here the other sadhus of his group went on a pilgrimage. Swami gave him a *champa* flower and said, “Smell this flower; all the pilgrim places are incorporated in it.”

By smelling the flower on Swami’s instruction, he experienced divine peace. Thereafter, he constantly felt peaceful in his heart by the darshan of and association with Swami. After the sadhus of his group returned from their pilgrimage, he left with Swami’s permission for Dholera in a happy mood.

In this way, all spiritual aspirants who came in contact with Swami realized his true glory and experienced eternal peace.

34. Swami in a Trance

Once, the *mahapuja* was being performed in the assembly hall. Swami was also present. Suddenly Swami entered into a state of deep meditation. He would not speak to anybody. Occasionally he would mutter, “O King Rahugan, you are ignorant.”

The news of Swami’s state spread far and wide in all directions. As a result, sadhus and devotees began arriving in Junagadh. All of them looked at Swami without blinking.

On the fourth day, after Thakorji was woken up at four o’clock in the afternoon, Swami got up on his own and sat on his seat in the assembly. All those who were present surrounded him. Swami looked at them and said, “At present your minds are all focussed on me, since all of you felt that Swami would abandon his body, so let us have his darshan. If your mind remains focussed forever, you have nothing else left to do for *moksha*.”

Then, narrating an anecdote he said, “Once upon a time, good clothes were produced in a particular place. The merchants used to send these clothes to other places. Deciding to sell them in a new place, the merchants went there with many bales of clothes. When the merchants reached the place, they found that the local people wore only loin clothes. So nobody bought their clothes. The merchants offered their clothes at half the price, still no one was prepared to buy them. So the merchants packed their bales of clothes and returned. However, one of the merchants thought that these people should be taught to wear clothes first, and then they would buy clothes on their own. So he distributed clothes free of charge. The people learned to wear clothes and eventually began to purchase them also. The merchant’s business also flourished. Similarly, other sadhus had come from Akshardham carrying bales of knowledge about Maharaj’s identity, but they doubted the readiness of the people, and so carried back their bales of knowledge; while I have been imparting the knowledge about Akshar and the supreme identity of Purushottam without discriminating between the worthy and the unworthy. Whether people understand these things or not is a different thing, but they will at least realize that Swami did spread this knowledge.”

After saying this Swami paused for a while, and then continued again, “Today you

are looking at me with all your passions and instincts under control. If the same state continues forever, then your base instincts such as doubt, karma, mineness, desire, physical love, ego, etc., will melt away, and your mundane desires will be overcome." In this way Swami talked on many important topics.

Then, Swami went for the darshan of Thakorji and had his meals. The sadhus and devotees also had their meals after four days of fasting.

35. Affection for Devotees

When Swami was at Junagadh, devotees from distant areas used to come there for his darshan. Among them was Mulji Shrotriya, a Brahmin from Akha. He asked Swami about the marriage of his son, Valji. Swami advised him to wait for one year. Mulji was also of the same opinion. But due to the pressure of the bride's parents, Valji had to marry.

Mulji again came to Junagadh and informed Swami about this. Swami was displeased but advised him, "Do not allow your son to go near the sugarcane crushing machine in your field."

Mulji went home and took all the precautions and did not allow Valji to go to the sugarcane field. But he happened to go there with his friends just on the day prior to which the crushing machine was to be shut down. At that time his father, Mulji, had gone out for some work, so Valji went near the crusher and put some sugarcane into it. All of a sudden his hand got caught in the crusher and he became unconscious on the spot. He was taken home but he did not survive.

In this way, everyone saw the result of ignoring Swamishri's commands.

* * *

Swami once arrived at the village of Thanagalol. He stopped on the outskirts and called Jasa Bhagat from the village. He prostrated before Swami, expressed his regrets and said, "Gopalanand Swami had instructed me not to leave this village because it is a village on the highway and therefore, I can render services to the travelling sadhus. But, these days, my business has declined."

On hearing this Swami said, "You don't come to the festivals and do not donate anything, so this misery has befallen you." Swami, thereafter, asked him to bring some grains and a piece of coarse cloth from his home.

According to the orders of Swami, Jasa Bhagat brought some grains and a piece of coarse cloth. The sadhus utilized the cloth as a filter and cooked *rotla* and *dal*. Swami took his meals under a banyan tree. Thereafter, Swami visited the field of Jasa Bhagat, sanctified it and said, "This land will yield plentiful crops. But donate five percent of what you earn to Thakorji. Follow the commands of Maharaj staunchly and start attending the festivals." Having said this, Swami proceeded further.

In this way, Swami used to look after the worldly affairs of the devotees and inspire them to follow the rules of dharma. Although the devotees lapsed in their duties during

trying circumstances, Swami took care of them very kindly.

36. Worldly Thorns

Swami had a unique way of imparting knowledge in the routine events of life.

Once Swami went to the mandir orchard. Meanwhile, Vaghjibhai from Vaso, Jetha Khachar from Sarangpur, Abhaysinh Darbar of Lodhika and other devotees came for Swami's darshan. They started prostrating before Swami. At this juncture, somebody commented, "Stop or the thorns will prick you."

On hearing this, Swami said, "If these thorns prick, they can be removed with a needle or any other sharp instrument; but the thorns in the bazaar are very bad! If they prick, there is no way to remove them."

One of the devotees inquired, "How can there be thorns in the bazaar?"

Swami replied to this enquiry with a smile, "You cannot understand what these bazaar thorns are like! There are thorns of beauty that prick the eyes, of music that prick the ears, of the touch of a sinful person that prick the skin, of the smell of a sinful person that assaults the nostrils, of taste that pierce the tongue, of dilemmas in the mind, of trifle desires in the consciousness and many other types of thorns. It is difficult to remove them and they keep on hurting and disturbing. And if the thorns are very poisonous then they can kill a person. So beware of such thorns. And for this purpose Swaminarayan has given a new remedy and brought the *niyams* and this Sadhu from Akshardham. Otherwise how could there be such pious behaviour?

Surpur, Narpur, Nāgpur e tinme sukh nāhi,
Kā sukh Harike charanme, kā santanke māhi.

"There is no happiness in Surpur, Narpur and Nagpur. There is happiness either at the feet of God or at the feet of a God-realized Sadhu."

"Therefore, obey the *niyams* and constantly keep the company of those who are really devoted, only then will the worldly thorns not prick you and you'll come out unscathed."

These talks touched deep down in the hearts of the people. Swami then went to the mandir as it was time for the evening *arti*.

37. From Pauper to Prince

One winter evening, Swami went for a bath along with sadhus and devotees at the Narayan Dharo, which had been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. After his bath, Swami narrated the glory of this pond. Soon, it was past sunset and the atmosphere turned chilly. Swami expressed a desire to light a fire. At a little distance from that place, a Muslim woodcutter and his mother were sitting with a bundle of sticks.

One of the devotees went over to them and asked, "There is an old sadhu with us,

who is shivering with cold. Will you give us some sticks?" The young woodcutter looked at his mother quizzically.

"Son, it seems he is a true fakir. Give him the whole bundle. He will bless us. Here, take these two sticks from my bundle, too, so that I may also be blessed." The young woodcutter gave away the bundle of sticks.

Swami was pleased to know about the goodwill of the old lady and said, "Now she will not have to cut wood any longer."

After sitting by the fire for some time, Swami and the others returned to the mandir.

The woodcutter, Bauddin, and his mother went home after selling the sticks in town. That very night Bauddin went out along with his sister to the market for some work. It was at that time that a procession with the Nawab was advancing along the streets. The Nawab saw Bauddin's sister. Impressed by her youth and beauty, he desired to marry her. He called both of them to his court and expressed his desire. The next day, after obtaining consent from their mother, Bauddin's sister married the Nawab.

With the passage of time, Bauddin rose to the post of personal assistant of the Nawab and eventually became the Diwan of the State. But Bauddin always remembered that his progress was due to the blessings of Swami, and so paid regular visits to the mandir. He used to sponsor meals and thereby render service to the sadhus. In this way, graced by the mere glance of Swami, Bauddin became a prince from a pauper!

38. Made Him Indifferent to Taste

For an aspirant who came into contact with Swami, his fetters of attachment to all the five senses were easily broken. There was a Nagar devotee who was fond of tasty food. He used to quarrel and create tension in the house if the food was not to his liking. He even used to throw away the dish. Members of his family were frustrated by his behaviour and they sent a complaint to Swami about it. This devotee used to pay regular visits to the mandir, but never attended the discourses. One day Swami called him to the assembly. The glance of Gunatitanand Swami fell on an ordinary *jiva!* The gates of his heart were unlocked. His worldly desires began to disappear as a result of Swami's talks.

Swami went for his meal after the assembly was over. The Nagar devotee thought that since Swami was the mahant of such a great mandir, he must be having tasty foods for his meal. With this thought in mind he followed Swami to the dining area. The *bhandari* sadhu served some crumbs in Swami's dish. The devotee thought, "It must be a sweet dish like *churmu* and… now Swami will mix sugar with it and pour ghee into it." But to his surprise some milk-like liquid was poured in it, so he thought it to be *dudhpak*. Swami could read his mind and so Swami poured some water into it and added salt and cumin powder. The Nagar doubted as to what he believed, and went

nearer to have a closer look. Swami said, “Dear brother! We eat these crumbs of *rotla* and buttermilk.”

The Nagar’s misconception was resolved totally. He was very surprised and introspected, “Oh! The mahant of such a great mandir eats such simple food!” With this thought in mind he went home. His food had become cold; but he consumed it without any fuss. On seeing this, all the members of his family were surprised. From then on, the Nagar devotee overcame his desire for tasty foods.

39. Advice to the Sadhus

Whenever groups of sadhus left on satsang tours as per the instructions of Swami, they were given a word of advice by Swami, “Now that you have become sadhus, you must play your role properly. You should not put your role to shame. Behave according to the traditions laid down in the Satsang by Maharaj. Insist on delivering and listening to spiritual discourses wherever you go. Moreover, act properly so that the devotees are pleased with your actions. Don’t think that you are going to preach to them. You should accept lessons from devotees who have total faith in Maharaj and observe all his moral instructions without any lapses. At present such devotees include Rayo Desai of Kamigadh, Karsan Bambhaniyo of Hamapar, Ram Bhanderi of Chadiya and Velo Sathwaro of Bagasara. All of them are true *satsangis*. Have their darshan and listen to their discourses.”

Swami gave such sound advice for the smooth interaction between renunciants and householders. Swami had turned ordinary and illiterate householders into such great devotees that even renunciants desired for their darshan. *Brahmagnan*, which is described in the shastras as difficult to attain, was made easily accessible by Swami to all who kept his company. Swami used to say, “I have taught *brahmavidya* to two hundred people.”

The following anecdote reveals the secret of this. One day, a devotee asked Swami, “Swami, the sadhus of Junagadh work very hard to render service to the mandir and to spread satsang in the villages. At other places sadhus lack such enthusiasm and zeal.”

Replying to this Swami said, “In every mission the guru has to take a lead; only then the disciples follow him. But if the guru remains inactive and orders his disciples, they will never work with a sense of commitment. Whenever there is a battle the drums beat. declaring, ‘The leader should die, the leader should die’. Thus, the general or the king leads and the rest of the army follows. Similarly, if the guru dedicates himself to the cause of service then the disciples would be inspired to render service.”

These words clearly revealed how much the guru has to exert in order to inspire his disciples. Swami used to say, “If the guru lives hundred percent then the disciples follow suit to some extent.”

Swami used to daily offer *pranams* to all the sadhus at their respective seats after his daily puja. After that he would deliver spiritual discourses. Only after the discourses

were over would he assign duties to all the sadhus – so that their minds did not remain preoccupied with the assigned duty during the discourses. Swami himself would also join in the assignments. After discourses he always used to go to the ailing sadhus and *parshads* to enquire about their health. He would massage somebody's feet, or attend to the various types of bodyaches of the ailing and the sick. To some he would give encouragement by talking in a gentle manner. In this way, Swami himself served the ailing sadhus. Swami had developed this huge mandir by his personal efforts. In this way Swami's ideal life was an example for his devotees, and they progressed as a result of this.

40. Abolished Poverty

The economic condition of Mavji Mistry, a mason of Rajkot, was very poor. He came to Junagadh and prayed to Swami. Swami, out of grace, asked him to purchase some grams and parched rice. Outside the mandir he met his Muslim friend, Musabhai, who gave him one more *ana* and told him to give him some of the *prasad* that Swami would give to him. Mavjibhai went to the market, bought the grams and parched rice for two *anas* and offered them to Swami. Swami offered it to Thakorji and then took just two grains from it. The all-knowing Swami distributed some *prasad* among the sadhus and gave the rest to Mavji, telling him to share it with Musabhai. Besides this, Swami gave him blessings to go to Karachi and start a contract business.

Mavji was puzzled and informed, "I don't know anybody there."

Swami replied, "You know me!"

Mavjibhai felt encouraged, but he had no fare to reach Karachi. Swami was omniscient and told him, "Your mother has buried Rs. 100 in an earthen pot under the grinding wheel. Ask for it."

Swami then instructed Mavji to make Musabhai his partner in the business. Swami was pleased even with the little service by Musabhai.

Mavabhai reached Rajkot and asked for some money from his mother. At first she flatly refused, "I do not have any money." But when Mavabhai told her about the order of Swami and pointed out the exact place, she gave him the money.

When Mavabhai disembarked on the port at Karachi, by chance he met an Englishman who gave him a big contract without any recommendation from anyone. Mavabhai earned a handsome amount from this contract and gradually the company of Mava-Musa achieved great success. In this way, as a result of Swami's blessings, Mavjibhai's poverty vanished and he earned a fortune and rendered a lot of services in Satsang.

41. An Obstinate Jiva

As a result of the spiritual association of Swami, many devotees were inspired to renounce the world and feel that the material pleasures are worthless.

Vasta was one such devotee. He was the son of Hansraj Patel of Bhayavadar and used to pay regular visits to Junagadh to remain in the company of Swami. He would remain absorbed in the spiritual discourses of Gunatitanand Swami, and a divine joy would spread on his face. But Swami would send him back to Bhayavadar. Again he would run away to Junagadh. Once, his father came to take him back, but he refused to go and expressed a desire to become a sadhu. Hansrajbhai was shocked to hear this. Although he himself was a sincere devotee, he did not like the idea of his son becoming a sadhu. He had cherished a desire to engage him in worldly affairs. So he was upset and told his son, "I don't want you to become a sadhu. It would put the family to shame." Finally, he took Vasta with him by force.

This time he locked him up in a room in his house with a heavy piece of wood tied to his leg. Vasta remained indifferent and chanted 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan'. Suddenly Swami appeared before him. Vasta requested him to take him to Junagadh. As a result of Swami's blessings he was unfettered and he followed Swami and reached the mandir square of Junagadh in the morning. Here he saw Swami in person, prostrated to him and began rendering service.

In the morning when Hansraj opened the room he found the lock intact, but Vasta missing. Hansraj went straight to Swami in Junagadh. Swami tried to coax him by saying, "Let Vasta worship God. You have three other sons and if Vasta worships God, you will also benefit."

Hansraj was shocked. He put up many excuses, saying, "Vasta is already engaged to be married, and the family prestige would be damaged." On the other hand Vasta was also very firm. Swami again tried to reason with Hansraj by saying, "What would you do if Vasta dies?" But Hansraj was resolute in taking his son back home.

In the morning when he was ready to take away Vasta with him he came to know that Vasta had a high fever from the previous night. Within a short time Vasta died and Hansraj returned home dejected. In this way Hansraj Patel saw the consequences of his obstinacy and non-compliance.

42. Revealed the Supremacy of Maharaj

On 9 March 1860 (Fagun *vad* 2, Samvat 1916), the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was ceremoniously consecrated in the mandir of Junagadh at the hands of Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj. After that, Swami, accompanied by Acharya Maharaj, arrived at Vartal via Bhavnagar. After celebrating the festival of Hari Navmi there, he went to Aniali near Vagad.

Bhai Atmanand Swami, who was initiated by Ramanand Swami, was living there at that time. He was 116 years old. He was very glad to meet Swami. He asked Swami why Maharaj had still not taken him to Akshardham. Swami explained to him that he

must be lacking in realizing the true glory of Maharaj. After that Swami explained about the supreme glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan with references from the Vachanamrut. He also added that it was not possible to attain the privilege of worshipping Maharaj without becoming *brahmarup*. Then he said, "Maharaj has kept you in this body to develop this *upasana*."

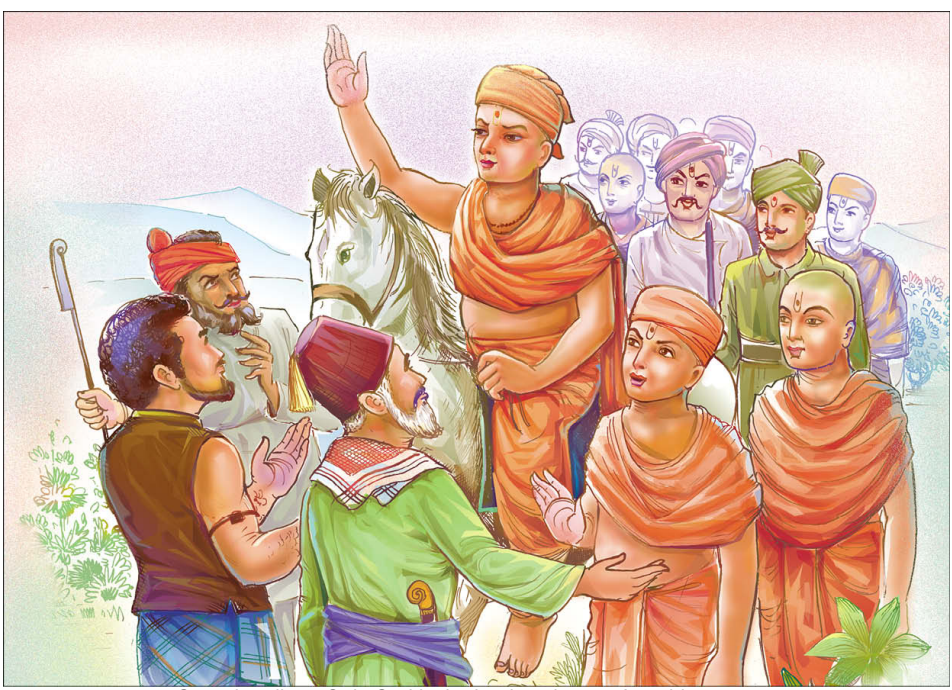
After hearing these words of Swami, Atmanand Swami was convinced about the true identity of Maharaj and about the glory of Swami.

When both the *sadgurus* sat down for their meal Atmanand Swami demanded *prasad* from Swami. Swami replied, "The river Ganga cannot flow in the reverse direction." He said this because Swami always received *prasad* from Atmanand Swami.

So Atmanand Swami said, "Till now, I had unknowingly given you *prasad* from my bowl, but now I have realized your true glory."

A short time after this incident, Atmanand Swami passed away.

43. "One Who Serves Is Mahant."



Swami replies, "Only God is the leader whereas I am his servant."

Swami arrived at Junagadh. Once, he was busy sweeping the mandir compound. At that time, the mahant of Tarnetar came there and asked Swami, "Who is the mahant of the mandir?"

Swami modestly replied, "He will be on his seat inside." And then Swami washed his hands and feet, came to the assembly hall and met him. He was surprised and

asked, “Just now you were sweeping the grounds. Are you the mahant?”

Swami replied with a smile, “In our organization one who serves is mahant.” Then he took down his *jholi* from the nail on the wall and showed it to the mahant. Swami had no item made from metal, even his *tilakyu* was made of wood. The garments he wore were made of coarse cloth. The mahant of Tarnetar was surprised to see such a detached mahant. Then Swami explained to him, “We have renounced women and wealth and therefore, our mahantship has been sustained.”

On hearing this, the mahant also felt that this is absolutely true. Among them the disciples kill the guru and occupy the throne, tempted by money and material things.

* * *

Once, accompanied by his group of sadhus and devotees, Swami was travelling in the villages around Junagadh. Swami was riding a horse and others were walking along. Some Muslims thought that if they killed the leader of the group, the Hindus would stop worshipping him. They joined the group with this malicious intention. They enquired of one or two sadhus from the group, “Who is your leader?”

The sadhus replied, “The person riding on horseback is our guru and a great sadhu.” The sadhus had replied innocently, thinking that they were enquiring for the darshan of Swami. But the Muslims immediately rushed to the horse and holding the reins they asked Swami, “Are you the leader?”

“Only God is the leader whereas I am his servant,” replied Swami casually with a smile.

The Muslims thought, “Oh! He seems to be some great fakir because he considers God as the leader.” They were humbled by this. They bowed to Swami and went away.

* * *

In 1861 CE (Samvat 1917), as per his promise, Raghuvirji Maharaj went as a pilgrim to Junagadh to remain in the company of Swami. He had given up his pomp and retained only one attendant. After getting ready in the early morning, he would arrive to listen to Swami’s discourses. Seeing his spiritual inclination, Swami also talked profoundly about *atma* and Paramatma. After the discourse was over he would eat *khichdi,* which he had left to cook for his meal, and then again sit in the assembly. In this way, he had stopped caring for his body in all respects. When Swami came to know that Acharya Maharaj did not take his meals properly, he started to visit his lodgings and talked to him there. He even used to get good meals cooked for him, and then made him dine properly. In this way, since Raghuvirji Maharaj gave up all obligations, abandoned all his pomp and remained in the company of Swami with total devotion, Swami dissolved his base nature.

44. Satsang in Sorath

Once, Acharya Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami went on a satsang tour in the countryside of Sorath. Then, while travelling, one of the bullocks of Acharya Maharaj’s

cart was injured and disabled. So Swami sent the attendants to the neighbouring village to fetch a better bullock in his name. The attendants went there and asked for a bullock in the name of Acharya Maharaj instead. But the farmers did not pay any heed to their request. Then the attendants were suddenly reminded of Swami's name and they made a fresh request in the name of Swami. In response, one of the farmers immediately came with a very good pair of bullocks. He bowed to Swami, and gifted a bullock by yoking it to the cart. Swami told him that he would return it to him, but the farmer said, "Swami, I cannot put a yoke on the bullock which has once pulled your cart."

The farmer then went back home. After his departure, the attendants narrated to Acharya Maharaj their experience in the village. Raghuvirji Maharaj then asked Swami, "If one who is not a *satsangi* dedicates so much to you simply on hearing your name, then what would a *satsangi* not do for you?"

On hearing this Swami smiled and said, "Maharaj, I've explained the glory of satsang to so many people of Sorath that I can fill up the Khengar well of Junagadh with the heads of the *satsangis* of Sorath." (This reflects the spirit of *satsangis* in giving their all at the word of Swami.)

At Junagadh, Swami had arranged discourses all day long. Once Swami said, "In this satsang, there are such talks which would transform a *jiva* into *brahman*." On hearing this Jaga Bhakta asked, "Then why does a *jiva* not become *brahmarup*?" Swami replied, "The *jiva* is not attached with affection to God or a God-realized Sadhu. If the *jiva* is so attached, then faith may be lacking. If faith is present, total honesty may be lacking. If there is affection, faith and honesty then it would be impossible for a *jiva* to remain without becoming *brahmarup*." Jaga Bhakta then asked, "Even if there is affection, why is faith lacking?" Swami replied, "This Jala Bhakta, for example, has affection for me, but he wouldn't do what I would ask him to do."

Raghuvirji Maharaj had once humorously remarked, "Now we will keep Gunatitanand Swami in Vartal." On hearing this remark, Jala Bhakta cried intensely. But if he was busy sweeping with a broom, and if Swami told him, "Stop this work and worship God," he would not follow Swami's words. Thus it is very difficult to have undivided faith in the God-realized sadhu.

45. Samadhi to Tulsi Dave

After celebrating the festival of Chaitra Punam on 14 April 1862 CE (Samvat 1918), Swami arrived at Botad. Swami heard the *purani,* Tulsi Dave, reading from a shastra and was pleased with him. Swami invited him to Junagadh. On his way to Junagadh one of the devotees asked him, "Tulsi, do you feel anything?"

He replied, "When I was at Botad, there were many thoughts in my mind; now all of them have stopped by being with Swami, and there is sheer bliss within."

After reaching Junagadh, Tulsi Dave asked Swami, "Swami, will you help me

master *ashtang yoga*."

Swami, than replied with a smile, "The final fruit of *ashtang yoga* is samadhi. You'll be graced with it."

Next day, Swami made him sit in meditation. By the grace of Swami he experienced samadhi. In the state of samadhi he first saw the six *chakras* in his body; then he accompanied Swami on a journey through *archimarg* – beginning from the *brahmarandhra*. He also saw the realm of Prakriti and Purush.

From there he followed the divine and luminous figure of Swami and saw Maharaj seated on a divine throne in Akshardham. Maharaj was surrounded by innumerable *muktas*. He could not recognise them, but by the grace of Maharaj he could identify Shivlal Sheth of Botad, Raghuvirji Maharaj and Gopalanand Swami. He went right up to the third step of Maharaj's divine throne. By the wish of Maharaj he asked six questions. Maharaj revealed the answers to him. Then he asked the seventh question, "Every one addresses Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar, so what should one understand?"

Maharaj asked him, "Do you want to see?"

He nodded. By the grace of Maharaj, he then saw bright light emanating from the *murti* of Swami as if that light was holding Maharaj and all the *muktas*, in the form of an abode. He also saw Swami in the form of a sadhu attending upon Maharaj. He then realized the true identity of Swami.

After waking up from samadhi, all the natural calls of his body disappeared and he attained the *niravaran* state. Even if he was locked up in a room he could get out. He remained in the *niravaran* state for about 12 months. After that, Bhaga Doshi called him to Botad, hence, Swami also withdrew his grace.

In this way, he made his devotees experience such a state of samadhi, which is difficult to attain even for the yogis.

46. Pragji Bhakta

Pragji Bhakta of Mahuva had remained in the service and company of Gopalanand Swami for thirteen years. In the end Gopalanand Swami had told him, "Pragji, go to Junagadh. The Jogi of Junagadh will fulfil the promises which I have given to you."

After that, once at Sarangpur, Gunatitanand Swami told Pragji Bhakta, "Pragji, I have been beholding the highest spiritual knowledge for many years; but now I wish to impart it to someone who has profound faith and spiritual zeal."

Pragji Bhakta said, "Swami, give me that knowledge. I'll spread it."

But it is not easy to gain such knowledge, which is beyond *maya,* and become one with Aksharbrahman. So Swami told him in a grave tone, "It is not possible to get that knowledge so easily. You can get it only if you renounce the world, attach your *jiva* to me and shatter the fetters of body and senses."

Pragji Bhakta took up the challenge and obeyed Swami.

Around this time Swami made him sit in meditation for nine days and enabled him

to see Shriji Maharaj and also made him one with his own (Swami's) self. To attain this grace of Swami, Pragji Bhakta had served without caring for his body and with a singleminded zeal for three-and-a-half years in the mandir, haveli construction and other services. He had performed even the menial jobs enthusiastically. At the same time he had observed fasts like *dharna-parna,* and listened to discourses. Looking at his enthusiasm and service Swami said, "Pragji, you seem to know even my inner wishes."

He had derived immense spiritual strength by Swami's grace. When Pragji used to mix lime for the construction of the new haveli with his bare feet, some sadhus used to advise him, "O Pragji, you'll become blind by the effect of this lime."

He would merely smile in reply and say, "I have sacrificed this body of mine for Gunatitanand Swami."

After celebrating the festival of Shravan Punam, Swami addressed the assembly and said, "Now I have retired and have entrusted the task of delivering discourses to Pragji Bhakta. Moreover, Shriji Maharaj had given me the key to Akshardham which I have now handed over to Pragji Bhakta." With these words Swami instructed all the sadhus and devotees, "Listen to Pragji Bhakta's discourses."

As a result of this, everyone felt that Swami was under the clutches of Pragji Bhakta and had passed all his knowledge, powers and mandir keys to him. After this incident there was opposition against Pragji Bhakta in Satsang.

Jaga Bhakta was also a leading disciple of Swami. Under instructions from Gopalanand Swami, he, too, had detached himself from everybody and had come to Junagadh to remain in the company of Gunatitanand Swami. He served according to the wishes of Swami and pleased him and became one of his foremost disciples. Other such devotees were Swami Balmukunddasji, Swami Yogeshwardasji, Swami Madhavcharandasji, Swami Madhavpriyadasji, Brahmachari Achintyanandji and devotees like Shivlal Sheth of Botad, Nathu Patel of Kariyani, Vaghjibhai of Vaso, Jetha Khachar of Sarangpur, Manji Thakkar, and others.

47. Purifying Influence of a True Sadhu

Vagha Khachar of Sarangpur was called an incarnation of the Sun-god. He used to stay with Maharaj for long spells. When Swami visited his residence at Sarangpur, he asked Swami a question, "Swami, in the Vachanamrut Shriji Maharaj has said that the root ignorance due to base instincts cannot be eradicated without meditating on God and obeying his commands. I have remained in the company of great sadhus, still at night I have dreams in which I see myself fighting in battles and losing my limbs. If that subtle attachment with the body in the dreams is yet not removed, when will the causal attachment of the body be removed? And unless that attachment is removed, how is it possible to transcend to Akshardham?"

Swami then replied with a smile, "Vagha Khachar! If you wish to remove attachment for the subtle and causal bodies, then come to Junagadh. I'll remove them

totally."

So Vagha Khachar went to Junagadh with Swami and, through his blessings, developed faith in Swami's true identity. Thereafter, his attachments to the subtle and causal bodies were removed. He constantly enjoyed the divine bliss of Brahman in his heart.

Dharmaswarupanand Brahmachari of Vartal was a contemporary of Maharaj. Once, Swami came to Vartal from Junagadh. Knowing Swami's greatness, he folded his hands and requested, "Swami, desires for taste do not bother me but other desires trouble me. So, kindly do something to remove them."

Swami then replied with a smile, "Out of the thirty virtues of a sadhu you have mastered one and twenty-nine remain to be mastered; come to Junagadh, I'll help you to attain them."

Who can utter such words unless he is a God-realized Sadhu? One who is God-realized can make others so. By the company of Swami, Dharmaswarupanand Brahmachari also attained realization. In this way Swami made everyone who sought his refuge experience his glory as Aksharbrahman by removing their deficiencies and making them *brahmarup*.

Similarly, there was another devotee of Ahmedabad, named Pitambardas. He formerly held a good post in the Collector's office in Surat. But he was full of desires for material pleasures. He wore fashionable clothes, sprayed perfumes on his clothes and body, and chewed twenty to twenty-five *pans* everyday. But once, when Swami had come to Surat, he was moved by Swami's discourses. He developed a strong desire to remain in the company of Swami, become free of material desires and attain the *brahmic* state. He conveyed his wish to Swami. Replying to him Swami said, "You dress like a harlot and are full of worldly desires so how will you be able to remain in my company?" But, eventually, after repeated requests, Swami told him to come to Junagadh.

He left his job and went to Junagadh with Swami. Here, Swami addressed him on talks from the Vachanamrut about becoming *brahmarup*. Swami showed affection towards him by remembering him often and giving *prasad*. Soon, Pitambardas developed attachment for Swami and began to change as a result of Swami's company. In this way, Swami enabled him to experience the *brahmic* state. After Swami's departure to Akshardham he settled at Ahmedabad and talked convincingly on the divine knowledge he had attained. Pleased with this, Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj asked him to renounce the world. He immediately became a sadhu and was known as Vignandasji. By the grace of Swami he pleased everybody at the Ahmedabad mandir by his constant spiritual discourses.

48. Equanimity in Honour and Humiliation

Swami had arrived at Vartal on 31 March 1866 CE for the Chaitra Punam festival

(Samvat 1922). According to the wishes of Swami, Pragji Bhakta had started revealing that Swami was the incarnation of Aksharbrahman. Some people resented this. So they decided to reprimand Swami on the occasion of this festival.

In the morning session of the Punam festival Karunanand Brahmachari of Gadhada, who was instigated by Shuk Muni's disciple, Hariswarupdasji, said, "This Gunatitanand Swami has become God. He is worshipped like a God. Why does anyone not take him to task about that?"

Shuk Muni supported him and said, "Nobody should call me Shukji, and all those who address Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar should stop doing so."

Swami was sitting unperturbed all the while. Then he said in a grave tone, "Only Shriji Maharaj is God. Nobody else can become God. I am a sadhu. But, just as where there is the rule of a king, there is also the rule of a queen. So, where the king's order prevails, there too, the queen's order prevails. Similarly, just as where there is the glory of God there is the glory of his Sadhu as well."

On hearing this nobody could utter a word. Then Prabhudas of Sinjiwada got up in the assembly and challenged, "Does anybody have the authority to speak to Swami like this?" Meanwhile someone called Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj. It was precisely at this moment that the bell for the *shangar arti* rang and so the assembly dispersed for the *arti*.

Swami accompanied Acharya Maharaj for darshan. After darshan, when Swami was descending the steps, a gardener came with a rose garland in his hands. As instructed by Acharya Maharaj the gardener garlanded Swami. Acharya Maharaj then retired to his residence. And when Swami was on his way to the sadhu's residence he met Sadhu Hariswarupdasji, the disciple of Shuk Muni. Swami took off the garland from his own neck, garlanded Hariswarupdasji and said,

Haldi jardi nav taje, khatras taje na ām,
Gunijan gunko nav taje, avgun na taje gulām.

"Just as turmeric does not abandon its yellow colour, raw mango does not give up its sour taste, similarly, a virtuous man does not abandon his virtues, and a slave does not give up his faults."

Saying this, Swami went ahead. Adbhutanand Swami, Shuk Muni and Pavitranand Swami then invited Swami to their seats and performed his puja, presented *dhotis* and gave him a packet of sugar and said, "Swami, please forgive our utterances."

Seeing Swami's equanimity on the occasion of honour and insult, the *sadgurus* were indeed convinced that Swami was Gunatit.

From Vartal, Swami went to Mahelav. Here he blessed little Dungar Bhagat (Swami Yagnapurushdasji – Shastriji Maharaj). Thereafter, Swami went to Junagadh and then toured in the Sorath region.

49. Reception at Ahmedabad

In 1867 CE (Samvat 1923), when he was on his way to Vartal for the Hari Jayanti festival, Swami came to know about the illness of Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj. He was feeling restless and had sent a special invitation to Swami. The Acharya accorded a grand reception to Swami by sending Keshavprasadji Maharaj (his son) and a group of sadhus and devotees with an elephant and chariots to greet Swami. After darshan at the mandir, Swami met Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj. The Acharya experienced peace on Swami's darshan. According to Swami's wish he took some food. Acharya Maharaj insisted and requested Swami to stay and celebrate the festival of Hari Jayanti in Ahmedabad.

In the festival assembly, Swami talked clearly about Maharaj as Purushottam. Keshavprasadji Maharaj and other sadhus of the Ahmedabad region were delighted. Swami said kind words of advice to Keshavprasadji to give up his long hair, moustache, habit of seeing dramas and indulging in fun and frolic, in order to properly observe the duties of an Acharya. Keshavprasadji Maharaj received Swami's advice positively and with joy.

The next day, accepting the heartfelt invitation of Acharya Maharaj, Swami and other sadhus of Junagadh went to his haveli for lunch. Acharya Maharaj placed a silver plate with a variety of foods before Swami. But Swami immediately asked for his wooden bowl. So his disciple, Balmukunddasji, brought it. Seeing this, Acharya Maharaj folded his hands and requested, "Swami, today, I pray that you please dine in this plate."

Swami then replied, "Maharaj has instructed us to eat only in a wooden bowl."

Acharya Maharaj further insisted and said, "Swami, for you gold and dust are equal. So I request you to dine in this plate."

Swami smiled and replied, "That is true, but Maharaj has ordered that we can dine in the dust-like wooden bowl, but not in the dust-like silver plate."

But then, to respect the wishes of Acharya Maharaj, Swami placed the wooden bowl in the silver plate and dined in his wooden bowl. He did not deviate even slightly from the commands of Maharaj. Thereafter, Acharya Maharaj served a variety of foods and urged Swami to eat them, but he did not do so. Balmukund Swami had made *rotlo* and Swami ate that, along with *mung dal*.

After honouring the wishes of Acharya Maharaj and giving him peace of mind, Swami departed for Vartal. After celebrating the festival of Chaitra Punam at Vartal, Swami went to Ahmedabad with the Acharya Maharaj of Vartal and other sadhus. From here he proceeded to Junagadh.

50. Final Divine 'Lila'

Swamishri blesses the crown prince, Bhagvatsinhji, in Gondal

In this way Swami consolidated the work of spreading *ekantik* dharma commenced by Shriji Maharaj. He inspired everybody to believe that Maharaj is the supreme God. Moreover, he raised many sadhus and devotees to the *ekantik* state through the realization of his form as Aksharbrahman. Swami spent forty years at Junagadh mandir, and during this period he discoursed profusely. He had made many aspirants worthy of Akshardham by helping them to attain the *ekantik* state.

Now his purpose of taking birth on the earth along with Shriji Maharaj had been fully served. Thousands of devotees had recognized the true forms of Akshar and Purushottam. Having established the foundation for the spread of the worship of Akshar with Purushottam, Swami thought of returning to Akshardham.

On 27 September 1866 CE (Bhadarva *vad* 3, Samvat 1923), after his morning routine, Swami had the darshan of Thakorji, arrived in the assembly, distributed *prasad* of cucumber, met all the sadhus and devotees and then prepared to leave the mandir. He mounted his horse, looked at the gates and said, "Shriji Maharaj had put me in charge of this mandir. Since then, I have lived here and looked after it for forty years, four months and four days. Now I'll travel in Satsang and will stay at Mahuva." (Swami's disciple, Pragji Bhakta, lived in Mahuva and thus Swami implied that through him he would remain manifest in the Satsang.) And with these words he rode away.

On his way to Vanthali, Swami said, "Whenever I pass this way I remember Maharaj."

Kashiram then commented, "One who has seen Maharaj is reminded of him."

On hearing this comment Swami said, "He is not away from you. He is manifest through this holy Sadhu. He gives darshan, talks and looks at you. He gives immense

bliss; but as long as there is ignorance you cannot experience it." In this way Swami talked in his characteristic manner, making everyone happy and encouraging all to be patient.

At Vanthali, Swami stayed at Kalyanbhai's place. There, Devjibhai asked a question which he had been thinking about for a long time. He asked, "Swami, what is Akshar like?"

Swami replied, "The one who is sitting here in your house is Akshar."

Swami graced the villages of Ganod, Upleta, Bhayavadar, etc. and went to Gondal on Aso *sud* 9, at the request of Madhavji Dave, the administrator of Gondal.

Swami celebrated the festival of Vijaya Dashmi at Gondal. At Navlakha Palace, the Maharaja accorded him a grand welcome. Abhaysinh Bapu of Ganod invited him to grace his palace. Thereafter, the Maharaja of Gondal made his prince, Bhagvatsinhji, bow down before Swami, and at his hands the Maharaja presented Swami with the document donating land to Radha-Raman Dev. Swami was very happy and blessed the prince by saying, 'He is a prince given by God, so I had named him Bhagvatsinhji."

After that Swami preached for a while and then reached the mandir at about 9.00 p.m. Madhavji Dave asked Swami to visit his place the next day. Swami then said, "Who has seen tomorrow!" And he sanctified his place that very night.

Then he returned to the mandir and sang the *chesta.* Thereafter, he sat in a *swastik* posture, resting his back on a pillar besides the throne of Thakorji. Then, at 12.45 a.m. (19 October 1866) Gunatitanand Swami left his body for Akshardham.[1]

Glossary

A

acharya administrative heads of Ahmedabad and Vartal regions

adad dal a type of edible pulse

aksharrup form of Akshar. That which has qualities similar to those of Akshar. Used to describe the spiritual state of akshar muktas. Highest level of faith or spiritual status is to become aksharrup and worship Purushottam

amrut nectar

ana one-sixteenth of a rupee

archimarg path leading to final abode, Akshardham

arti ritual worship in which lighted wicks are waved before the deities

ashtang yoga eight-fold yoga

atma soul

B

barfi a sweet delicacy

bhagvat dharma see ekantik dharma

bhagvati diksha initiation into saffron robes

bhandari chief cook

Brahman Aksharbrahman

brahmanized one who has become like Brahman

brahmarandhra one of the six seats of different deities in a human body

brahmarup form of Brahman

brahmavidya knowledge of Brahman

brahmic state like that of Brahman

C

chaitanya brahma the luminous form of Brahman

chakras seats of different deities in a human body

champa a kind of flower

chandlo round mark of kumkum applied on the forehead

chaturbhuj divine form of God having four hands

chaturmas four months of the monsoon season

chesta verses describring the divine form and glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

churmu kind of sweet dish made of crumbled fried wheat flour, ghee and jaggery or sugar

D

dagli waistcoat

dal spicy soup made with pulses

darbar royal court

dharna-parna vow of fasting on alternate days

dhoti lower body garment

diksha initiation

dudhpak sweet, thickened milk with rice

dudh-pauva parched and flattened rice with sweet milk

E

ekantik dharma collective term for the four endeavours of dharma, jnan, vairagya and bhakti

G

guna quality

Gunatit transcends the three gunas

H

Harililakalpataru a scripture

I

ishwar one of the five eternal realities

J

jalebi kind of sweet made from gram flour, sugar, ghee, etc.

jholi a bag made of cloth used by sadhus

jiva soul; one of the five eternal realities

jnan spiritual knowledge; wisdom

juvar a kind of grain

K

kalp a day of Brahmā equal to 4.32 billion years

kanthi necklace of sacred beads worn by devotees of the Sampradaya

khichdi spiced boiled rice and lentil grain

kori an old silver coin of Kutch valued at one-third of a rupee

kotha wood-apple

L

lila divine actions

M

mahaprasad prasad offered at the time of festive celebration

mahapuja special kind of puja

mala rosary; beads

maya one of the five eternal realities; anything that obstructs one from worshipping God

moksha release for the jiva from the cycle of births and deaths to enjoy the eternal bliss

of God

motaiya ladoo a sweet delicacy

mukta liberated soul

mung dal soup made from mung beans

muni holy man

murti icon

murti-pratishtha consecration of murtis in a mandir

N

niravaran without any obstruction

niyam moral and spiritual disciplines, and religious codes of conduct prescribed by God, the Satpurush, or the scriptures

P

pagh traditional Indian headgear

pan betelnut leaves

paramhansa a sadhu of the highest order

parshad male renunciant in white robes

pendo a sweet delicacy

pitambar yellow silken cloth garment

pranam salutation; obeisance

prasad consecrated food

purani a person reading scriptures

R

ras traditional group dance indigenous to Gujarat

rotlo traditional bread made of millet flour

S

Sachchidanand three characteristics of Brahman: truth, consciousness and bliss

sadguru a high ranking sadhu, also a realized sadhu

sadhuram respectful address for a sadhu

sampradaya an organization which follows the truthful sermons (sat-updesh) given by a succession of spiritual gurus

sata a kind of sweet

satsang good company; spiritual association

satsangi one who practices satsang

shangar arti second arti of the day, performed after breakfast has been offered and the murtis have been adorned with garments, ornaments and garlands

sud bright half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar

sutarfeni a sweet delicacy

swadharma one's own dharma

swastik a yogic posture; a Hindu symbol

T

thal a dish full of food items served to God

tilak a U-shaped mark made on the forehead with sandalwood paste

tilakyu a small tool for applying tilak

U

upasana worship of God, with special emphasis on his greatness and glory

V

vad dark half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar

vaidya a doctor practising Ayurveda

vairagya detachment

vartman vows

vicharan spiritual travels

vimans divine chariot

Y

yagna Vedic offering

yogi ascetic

yogic power attained by one knows Yoga

1. Swami's body was placed on a beautiful palanquin, and a full Vedic puja was performed. After that, his funeral rites were performed on the banks of the river Gondali. On this spot, a small and beautiful shrine was built. This shrine is famous as Akshar Deri. Later, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj built the three-pinnacled Akshar Mandir over the Akshar Deri. In it he consecrated the *murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami and Shriji Maharaj, that is, Akshar and Purushottam. Later, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj spread the glory of this sacred memorial shrine, Akshar Deri, everywhere.